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THE SNOW-ON
HAH-DAGH
AND
MMALAT
BEY

ALEXANDRE
DUMAS



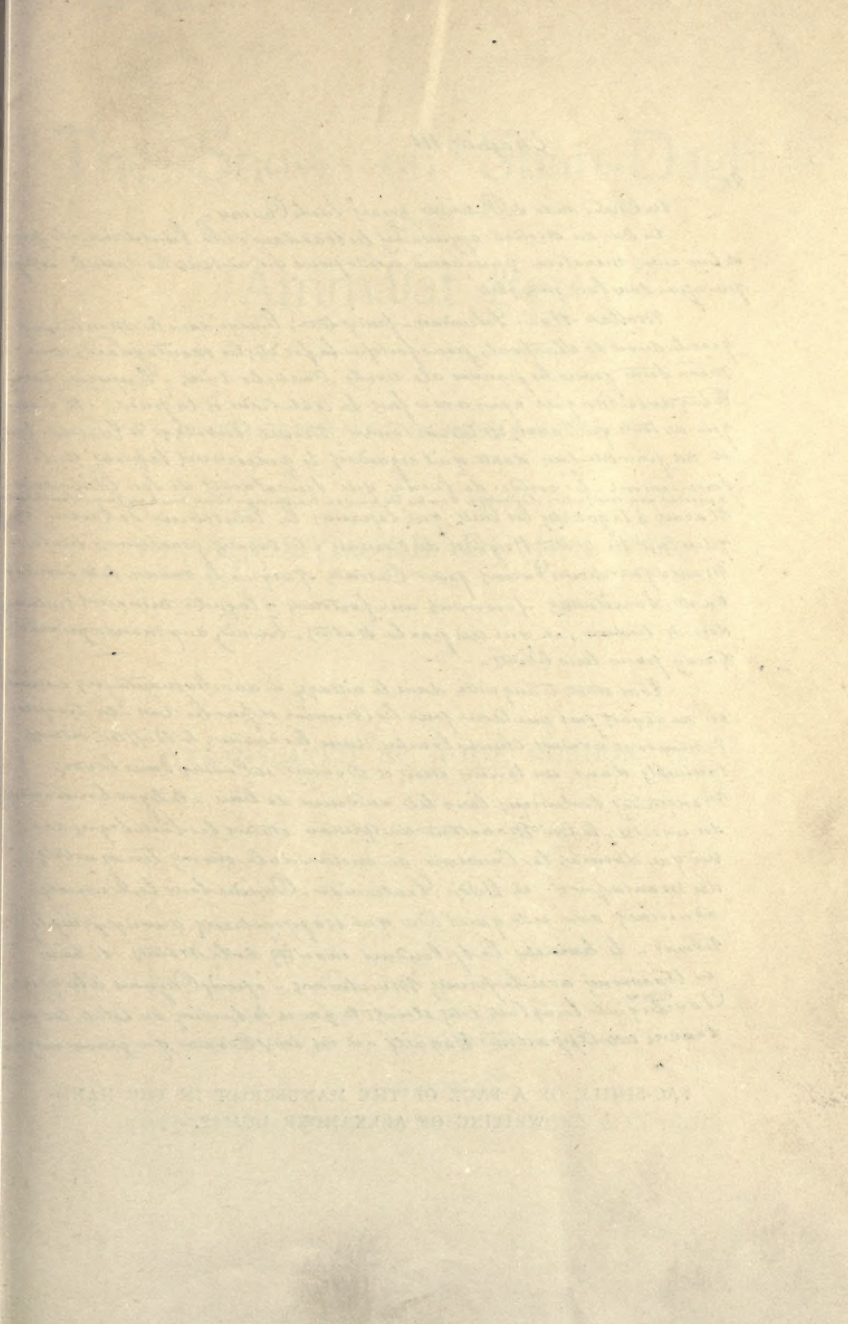
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The Snow on Shah-Dagh

AND

Ammalat Bey

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Chapter III

81

Un Charbon mis de Pindemur paraj suade Pincus -
 les Car des molles, appuillains les Habitans de la Pindemur als pines
 et lous autres monstons apres avoir mis les pines les roches - Sottigian
 pour a peu de lais immobils

Mollat - Hadji. Toleman - jeune turc, l'un des dans les montagnes
gracile d'ivan de Constantinople, prouva fort qu'il la force. Les montagnes, et en
même temps prouva les femmes alla revolt. Contre les russes. L'apostrophe leur
la tête dola Moquie après avoir fait le Abolition en la prout, - Il y avait
jeu de tout qu'il avait été Ch. ad. Comme. Mollat, l'un des de l'abolition l'agly
et ces pour cela sans doute qu'il regardait le prouvement l'apostrophe et si
seraient en eux. Les ronds de femmes qui l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
et regardait avec satisfaction, l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
N'avais à la gauche les Cris qui l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
jeu de tout les Cris de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
Montagne des ronds pour Cascade - jusqu'à la moitié de la montagne
ou aller l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
des ronds de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des de son Ch. l'un des
et ainsi prouva leur liberté.

Cette scène tranquille dans le village, et dans les montagnes, nous en ne voyant pas une Ame par les Chemins et par les rues - les troupeaux de moutons erraient cherchant l'ombre dans les ravins, les ruisseaux, les vallées rassemblée dans un torrent étroit et boueux du Couvent, dans les vases montrant seulement leur tête au dessus de l'eau - les insectes bourdonnant des insectes, la Vie monotone du Gellion etant les seuls signes de vie qui donnaient la couleur au milieu de la mort tranquille des montagnes - et Hadji Gaudemian, couché sous la Casaque admirait avec cette quietude qui s'ajoute à la contemplation de la Nature si bien en harmonie avec le pauvre Musulman - à peine Clignait-il les yeux dans ^{l'espérance} de quelques bonheurs, de la sainte et douce chaleur du soleil, lorsqu'il traversait cette Apparente Vaguerie - et ses deux Cavaliers qui gravissaient au

FAC-SIMILE OF A PAGE OF THE MANUSCRIPT IN THE HAND-
WRITING OF ALEXANDER DUMAS.

The Snow on Shah-Dagh#

AND

Ammalat Bey)

POSTHUMOUS ROMANCES)

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS PÈRE

TRANSLATED BY HOME GORDON)

o o o



1) LONDON: #

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P R E F A C E.

IN presenting to the English public the only posthumous romances still unpublished from the pen of the most illustrious of all French writers, the elder Dumas, it is my duty to indicate the authenticity of the manuscript.

An English lady still residing in Fontainebleau was presented with a packet of manuscripts by an old friend long since deceased. She is now aged, in bad health, and totally blind, so unwilling to be drawn into the glare of publicity over this affair. At my last interview with her in June of the present year, she was not desirous to revive forgotten reminiscences or to betray the antecedents of these manuscripts, the identity of which is internally and otherwise incontestably proved.

On examining the manuscript she perceived many blank leaves and gaps, in what she supposed to be a single romance, so she was of opinion that an incomplete tale could not have much value in spite of

the distinguished name attached to it. Coming to England in 1890, on a visit to my wife and myself, she decided to offer me the sheets, knowing me to be a collector of autographs and likely to appreciate the work for the sake of the signature, appended in three places.

The manuscript remained among my literary treasures until the winter of 1898, when I presented three public libraries to Cyprus—namely, to Larnaca, Nicosia, and Limassol—after the death of my wife. This collection of loose pages was destined for the edifice at Larnaca, but, thinking that an unpublished work of so famous an author should not be relegated to a shelf in a public library, I withdrew it and took it with me to Paris.

I called upon MM. Calmann-Levy, the publishers of all the works of the elder Dumas. In my presence they placed the manuscript by the side of the autograph letters and pages from the works of this great author. They had no hesitation in declaring the manuscript to be an absolutely authentic and entirely genuine work of the elder Dumas. I was visited by the son-in-law of Alexandre Dumas, who informed me he was his legal heir. He also inspected the document and stated he was perfectly satisfied that it was an unpublished and hitherto unknown work by his

famous relative. It, however, seemed to me that the law of copyright gave me but little share in any proceeds derived from publication of the work in its native tongue.

Being in indifferent health, and extremely anxious to be spared all unnecessary anxiety, I brought this manuscript over to London, and entrusted it to Mr. Gordon for translation into English and publication. After long and patient examination of the documents he found that they consisted of two complete stories. In that form I now offer them for perusal, believing that they will add to the world-wide renown of the most versatile and prolific author of modern times.

S. APOSTOLIDES.



TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

WHEN M. Apostolides gave me the Dumas MS. I found it had been arbitrarily divided by a member of the firm of Levy into four parts. A memorandum was appended stating that over twenty pages, including one complete chapter, were missing. I eventually discovered that the manuscript consists of two complete romances, and not a single page is missing, though many had been erroneously numbered by the author, apparently through careless haste.

Four hundred loose sheets of paper, written on both sides, in a very minute and illegible hand, have gradually been deciphered. Punctuation was intermittent, and proper names were frequently spelt in widely different fashion. These details have, of course, been carefully remedied, but the paragraphs are exactly as arranged by Dumas himself, and the translation has been as *literal* as possible. It is my own impression that Dumas put the romances on one side to await a revision, which they never

obtained. This hypothesis would account for some minor anomalies, which in no way affect the course of the narrative, and for occasional baldness in the dialogue.

In the geographical words, the current spelling has been adopted for the better known, whilst for very obscure towns, as well as for the native names, for various portions of dress, accoutrements, and so forth, I am of opinion that readers will prefer the reproduction of Dumas' own spelling, rather than pedantic adherence to dry-as-dust orthography.

The first story contained a number of Tartar words, all carefully translated by Dumas, but absolutely undecipherable to anyone not acquainted with that language. Application to the Russian Consul in Great Winchester Street elicited the reply that, so far as the genial official was aware, no one in London could interpret the characters. After unsuccessful efforts in several directions, I decided to follow the experienced advice of my friend, Mr. George Miles, of Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall, who considered that the words should be entirely excised as an uninteresting impediment on the course of the narrative.

By the courtesy of the Editor of the 'Outlook,' I was able to place before English readers a careful

account of the recent adventures of the manuscript and its contents. Both in that admirable paper and in the 'Sketch' have been published reproductions of specimen pages. So, whilst every effort has been made to obtain contradiction of the genuineness of the documents, the fact that no single individual has challenged the handwriting of the elder Dumas forms an additional proof of the authenticity of this unexpected and most interesting literary production. Whatever credit may be due to the following translation must be mainly ascribed to the untiring and patient labour of my wife in deciphering the illegible manuscript entrusted to me by M. Apostolides. To her able and prolonged assistance I am deeply indebted, and it would have been only fair had she acceded to my request to associate her name with mine on the title-page. As it is, I gratefully render her this slight tribute for invaluable and discriminating collaboration. I must also recognise the kind help in translating obscure words afforded me by Mr. George Heath.

HOME GORDON.



THE SNOW ON SHAH-DAGH.

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

FORTY DEGREES OF HEAT IN THE SHADE.

God give us rain to wash the stones and the pebbles.

THE mournful and sonorous voice of the Muerzin could be heard, like the death-song of a splendid day in May just disappearing into Eternity.

‘By Allah, it is hot in Derbend! Go up on the roof, Kanina, and see how the sun is setting behind the mountain. Is the western sky red? Are there any clouds?’

‘No, uncle, the sky in the west is blue like the eyes of Kitchina. The sun is setting in all its glory and looks like a flaming rose on the bosom of the night, and the last glance it bestows on the earth has not power to pierce the thinnest mist.’

Night unfolded its spangled fan. Darkness came.

‘Go up on the roof, Kanina,’ said the same voice,

‘and look if you do not see the dew fall from the horns of the moon. Is it not hidden on the nocturnal rainbow like a pearl in the sheltering shell?’

‘No, uncle, the moon is sailing in an azure ocean and shoots darts of fire into the sea; the roofs are dry like the steppes of Moghana and the scorpions play gaily there.’

‘Come,’ said the old man, with a sigh, ‘that means to-morrow will be as hot as to-day. The best thing to do, Kanina, is to sleep.’

The old man fell asleep and dreamt of his money, and his niece fell asleep and dreamt of love, as every girl of sixteen dreams, no matter to what nation she belongs. The town fell asleep and dreamt that Alexander the Great had built the wall of the Caucasus and forged the iron gates of Derbend. Thus, towards midnight, all were asleep.

Amid this universal silence could be heard only the cry of the soldiers shouting to one another, *Houchaij*—‘listen,’ and the moan of the Caspian Sea as it came to kiss the burning and sandy shore with damp lips.

One might have imagined the souls of the dead conversing with Eternity, and this probability was all the more likely because nothing so closely resembles an enormous cemetery as the town of Derbend.

Long before the peep of dawn the surface of the sea seemed aflame, and the swallows, awake before the Mollah, were singing on the mosque. It is true they did not long precede him, and the noise of his feet made them fly away as he walked round the cupola, resting his head on his hand and crying, with modulations which gave to his words the appearance, if not the reality, of a song :

‘Awake and arise, Mussulmen ; prayer is worth more than sleep.’

A voice replied to his and said :

‘Go up on the roof, Kanina, and see if there is not a mist coming down from the mountains of Daghestan. Tell me, does not the surface of the sea grow darker ?’

‘No, uncle, the mountains seem clothed in pure gold, the sea shines like a mirror, the flag droops against the flagstaff on the fortress of Narin Kale, like a veil round the figure of a girl. The water is calm, not the tiniest breath of wind blows a grain of dust on the road : all is still on earth, all is pure in heaven.’

The face of the old uncle darkened, and after the performance of his ablutions he mounted to the roof to say his prayers. He unfolded the carpet which he carried under his arm, knelt down, and when he had

concluded his formal petition he commenced to pray from his soul.

Looking sadly around he cried : ‘ May my words resound to the glory of the Holy and Charitable God ! ’

He then continued to say in Tartar what we will quote in English,¹ at the risk of taking from the prayer of Kanina’s uncle the picturesque and poetical character lent to it by the language of Turkistan :

‘ Clouds of spring, children of our world, why do you stay on the summit of the rocks—why do you hide like Lesgian brigands? You love to wander over mountains, and to sleep on peaks of snow and granite. So be it. But could you not amuse yourselves otherwise than by sucking the moisture from our fields in order to pour it out on some forest impenetrable to man? On our valleys you only permit the descent of cataracts of pebbles, which seem the fleshless bones of your victims. Oh, capricious children of the air, see how our unhappy land opens thousands of mouths! It is dying of thirst; it implores a little rain. See how the ears of corn quiver, see how they break when a butterfly has the imprudence to rest on them: how they lift their heads hoping to inhale a little moisture, and how

¹ Dumas, of course, says ‘in French.’—*Translator’s note.*

they are scorched in the rays of the sun which devours them like a flame! The wells are dry, the flowers have no more perfume, the leaves of the trees wither and fall, the grass smokes, the madder-root is lost, the crickets cry themselves hoarse, the grass-hoppers croak, the oxen are fighting for a little mud, and the boys are disputing for a few drops of water. My God, my God, what is to become of us? Drought is the mother of hunger, hunger is the mother of pestilence, pestilence is the sister of brigandage. O, fresh winds from the mountains, waft to us on your wings the benediction of Allah! O, ye clouds, mammals of life, pour on the earth the milk of heaven! Convert yourselves into storms if you will, but refresh the earth. Strike with lightning the sinners, if it be your pleasure, but quench the thirst of the innocent. Grey clouds, wings of angels, bring us refreshing coolness; hasten, speed, fly to us, and you will be welcome!’

But the old man prayed in vain. The clouds remained invisible. It was hot. It was suffocating. The inhabitants of Derbend were quite ready to look for coolness in their ovens.

Remember, this was in the month of May, when at Petersburg can be heard great cracks in the direction of the north-east: when the ice of the Ladoga is

breaking, and threatens to carry away the bridges of the Neva ; when a chill can be caught crossing the Place of Isaac ; when bronchial catarrhs are obtained by turning the corners of the Marble Palace ; when people cry to one another from Smolnoy to the English quay : ' If you go out, do not forget your pelisse.'

At Petersburg folk thought of the spring which might come. At Derbend people thought of the harvest about to commence.

For five weeks not a single drop of rain had fallen in Derbend, in the south of Daghestan, and the temperature would have been forty degrees Centigrade in the shade—if there had been any shade. The fact remains that there were fifty-two degrees of heat in the sun.

A drought in the East is a terrible thing. It burns up the fields and deprives everything of nourishment that has the breath of life : the birds in the air, the beasts in the fields, the men in the town. In a country where the transport of wheat is always difficult and sometimes impossible, drought is invariably the precursor of famine. An Asiatic lives from day to day—not remembering yesterday, not disturbing himself about to-morrow. He lives thus, because, to him, the idleness and the *far niente*

are the sweetest possible enjoyment. But when he has no Joseph to explain to him the parable of the seven lean kine, when misfortune falls suddenly on his shoulders in the hideous shape of famine, when to-morrow becomes to-day, he begins to complain that he is not given the means of subsistence—instead of working for them. He gets angry, and when it is necessary to act he augments the danger by his fear, as he professed to diminish it by his incredulity.

You can now judge of the trouble at Derbend, a town entirely Tartar and consequently entirely Asiatic, when this Senegalian heat began to burn up the hopes of the merchant and the ploughman.

There were really at that time many causes for alarm in Daghestan. In the days of the Mollah Murid Kari, the adopted father of Chamill, when the inhabitants of Daghestan had revolted, more bullets than seeds of wheat were sown in their fields, and the horses had trodden down the ground instead of ploughing it. Fire had destroyed the houses, so the sun only heated the ruins, and the mountaineers, instead of attending to the harvest, rode under the flag of the Mollah Kari or hid themselves in the caves or forests to escape from the Russians, or rather to fall upon them when they least expected it.

The consequence of all this was not difficult to predict. It was famine. The seed not having been sown, there was no harvest. All that the war had spared—silver plate, rich weapons, beautiful carpets—were sold for a mere song at the bazaar. The most lovely necklace of pearls in Derbend could be bought for a sack of flour. Those who had neither plate nor weapons, nor carpet nor pearls, killed their flocks, eating what had been left by friends and foes—that is to say, the mountaineers and the Russians. At length the poor came down from the mountains to ask for alms in the town, whilst they took all they could get without asking.

At last some vessels laden with flour arrived from Astrakhan; for the rich, either willingly or under compulsion, assisted the poor. The people were for the time appeased.

The new crop might yet set everything right.

The feast of Khalil had come, and it was celebrated by all the inhabitants of Derbend.

The Khalil is a religious festival of the same type as the feast of Shah Hussein, the first Khalifa, martyr of the sect of Ali. They had rejoiced, all the time it lasted, with the infantine gaiety of the Oriental. During this festival—the only distraction of the people in the whole year—they had, little by

little, forgotten the crops and the heat ; or, rather, they had not forgotten them. No. They had simply thanked Heaven that the rain had not interfered with their amusements.

But when the feast was over and they found themselves confronting reality, when they awoke with parched lips, when they saw their fields baked by the sun, they lost their heads.

It was then curious to see the red beards and the black beards wag ; it was curious to hear the noise the beads made revolving in their fingers.

All the faces grew long once more, and again nothing but grumbling could be heard.

It was indeed no joke to lose a crop, and to pay two roubles a measure for flour, without knowing what price might have to be paid for it later.

The poor trembled for their lives, the rich for their purses. Stomachs and pockets both contracted at the mere thought.

It was then that the Mussulmen took to praying in the mosque. The rain did not come.

They prayed in the fields, thinking that in the open air they had two chances instead of one—not only that of being heard, but also of being seen. Not a drop of rain fell.

What was to be done ?

They had recourse to their custom. First, the boys spread their handkerchiefs in the middle of the street ; they collected the pieces of money thrown on them, buying with them torches and rose-water. Then, fastening branches of trees to the body of the most beautiful boy, ornamenting him with flowers and covering him with ribbons, they marched with him in procession through the streets, singing verses to Gudoul, the god of rain.

The hymn ended with a verse of thanksgiving. They did not doubt that Gudoul, powerful as he was, would yield to the prayer of his worshippers.

In this manner the lads sang with bare heads this thanksgiving during three days. But our verses do not pretend to do more than very feebly render Arabian poetry :

Gudoul, Gudoul, god of water,
Bid this parching drought to cease ;
At thy voice the heavens falter,
Us with plenteous rain release.
Go, sweet maiden to the streamlet,
Brimful fill thy pitcher there :
Returning, 'neath the weight within it,
May'st thou bend thy form so fair.

All the young people of Derbend danced round the Tartar youths with ribbons and crowns of flowers. So certain were they of having rain, that, as in the hymn, they sent girls to the fountain.

In truth, clouds gathered in the sky, the sun grew dark as the face of a miser obliged to give back the money entrusted to him, and the grass assumed that tone of sadness which dull weather gives to the earth.

But as the sky darkened, the inhabitants rejoiced. A few drops of water fell. They shouted with all their might, 'Sekah Allah.'

But their joy was short-lived. The wind blew from the Persian quarter as hot as though it came from a furnace, and wafted with it the last little cloud, which disappeared to fall as snow at Petersburg.

The sun shone more brilliantly, the ears of corn cracked in the sun, the flowers drooped their heads, and the faithful, even the most faithful, began to doubt, not the power of Mahomet but that of Gudoul.

A new day dawned. The sun fulfilled its flame-like course and then sank to sleep behind the mountain, like a traveller in the desert wearied with the burning sand.

It was on this day, and on the night which followed it, that the conversation was held between Kanina and her uncle which opened this chapter.

The old Tartar had then addressed to the clouds the prayer which we have tried to translate, but in

spite of the fervour of his petition, this day, like its predecessor, passed without a drop of water.

It was then that the Governor of Derbend stated that the temperature was forty degrees in the shade and fifty-two degrees in the sun.

CHAPTER II.

A HOLY MUSSULMAN.

Khalh : The People ; Berbade : Absurdity.

Tartar Dictionary.

WHEN you pass through Derbend, traveller, from whatever land you be, whether you come from south or north, from east or west, visit the principal mosque, I implore you.

Otherwise, as the Catholics say, you will have been to Rome without seeing the Pope.

What will you have to say about Derbend, I ask you, if you have not seen the principal mosque ?

Whilst if you have seen it—then that's another story.

The grand mosque, you will say, whilst wiping your tobacco-pouch if you are a *savant*, or whilst knocking the ashes from your pipe if you are simply a smoker—the grand mosque must in olden times have been a Christian church. Continue boldly, I will take all the responsibility. It was a church, or rather

it was a Christian church—you continue—because it faces the east, whilst the north-easterly Mahometan mosques would be turned to the south-south-east—to use a nautical expression—in order to look towards the two sacred cities, of Mecca, where the prophet was born, and Medina, where he is buried.

This immediately gives you a very becoming air of learning. Continue.

On entering, you discover a great court with a well in the middle, shaded by magnificent plane-trees. Three doors, always open, symbolically and materially call the Mussulman to prayer, for a verse of the Koran over the principal entrance attracts the eye. Enter, but first take your Turkish slippers off your feet and earthly remembrances from your mind—do not bring into the house of Allah either the mud of the road or of your thoughts—kneel and address yourself to him in prayer: do not count your possessions but your sins; there is one God and Mahomet is his prophet,

After that, cough and pause. It is worth the trouble; you give the impression that you know Turkish.

You resume.

Mussulmen pray leisurely; remaining on their knees or lying on the carpets, according as they pass

from adoration to ecstasy : nothing, especially in the latter stage, can distract their attention.

Then your reminiscences as a story-teller lead you back to the past and you cry aloud :

‘O, Christian builders of this temple, where are you? Are you remembered anywhere but in heaven? You are forgotten in the history of Derbend, and to-day the verses of the Koran re-echo where formerly were heard the hymns of the Prophet-King.’

Now that you have finished your narrative and have acquired the right to be a corresponding member of the sections of inscriptions and of *belles-lettres* in the French Academy—the most learned of all academies, as is well known—I resume the thread of my history. For take note that it is a history, a true history, and not a spurious romance like so many published in the much-vaunted Paris, and which were called so immoral by the last Republican Chamber that the only means which could be found of making them moral was to affix the Government stamp.¹

I resume, as I observed, the course of my narrative.

¹ Do not let us forget that the man who thus writes is a Russian, and by his nationality as a Russian he is entitled to scoff at this grand and wise measure, which would have saved French literature from ruin, if it could be saved.—*Note by the translator, Alexandre Dumas.*

Among Mussulmen of all countries, and especially the Mussulmen of Daghestan, the court of the mosque is the habitual place of meeting. It is there the merchants come to discuss their commercial affairs, and the Tartar chiefs their political affairs. The first have only one object, to endeavour to cheat their customers; the second have also only one, to free themselves from their master. The former have sworn before Allah to be honest; the latter have sworn to be faithful to their Emperor. What would much surprise our public functionaries, our judges, and our legislators, is that they regard this oath as a simple formality, which is of no importance and is not binding.

Are, by any chance, the Asiatics, whom we believe behind us in civilisation, on the contrary in advance?

It would be very humiliating, and in that case we must hasten to overtake them.

You clearly understand that in this period of terrible heat, which we have tried to delineate, the court of the mosque was the only place where trees grew, and in consequence where there was shade—accordingly only forty degrees of heat—so it was full of people: effendi with white beards, muphti with red beards, in groups more or less numerous, as the

members were more or less talkative. But the knowledge of some folk and the holiness of others did not extract the smallest drop of water from the sky.

And the beards, though of all lengths and of every colour, were incapable of thinking of an alternative. There was much conversation and even more argument, but finally conversation and argument terminated with this word 'Nedgeleikh'—'what shall we do?'

Shoulders were shrugged up to the ears, eyebrows raised to the papak, and the various babels united in one cry, 'Amane, amane'—'hear us, save us!'

At last a prince spoke.

He was not only a prince but holy: two things which were formerly often united in Russia and in France, but nowadays are only to be found in the East.

It is true that his sanctity, like his principality, came by inheritance.

He was a descendant in the sixty-second degree from Mahomet, and, as is well known, all descendants of Mahomet, no matter of what degree, are holy.

He warmed his eloquence in the smoke of Kabam, and his golden words made their way through the smoke of Turkish tobacco.

‘Amane, amane! You cry to Allah and you believe that Allah will be fool enough to forgive you because of this cry, and that he will believe in your repentance without any other proof. No, brethren, no. The Koran is not kissed by lips still greasy with the flesh of swine. God is not deceived by flattering words and plaintive voices. He is not a Russian governor. He knows you thoroughly; our hearts are befouled with more abominations than our lips. The place where the Angel Gabriel records the faults of men is full of your sins. Do not think from day to day you can cleanse your hearts by prayer and fasting. God sees your reflection in the sun by day, and in the stars by night. He knows every thought in your souls, and hears every beat of your hearts. He knows that you go to an apothecary and, on the pretext of purchasing balm, you buy brandy with a false label. But God is not to be deceived by such methods. The word of Mahomet is positive: he who, in this world, has drunk the wine of the vine shall not, in the next world, drink of the wine of life. No. You have no rain for your harvests because you have polluted the source of the

waters of heaven by exhausting the patience of the Saviour with your impure actions. Your lips will be even more parched with prayer than the earth, and no drop of water shall fall to refresh it. Allah is great, and you yourselves are the cause of your misfortunes.'

The orator concluded, lifted his eyes to heaven, stroked his red beard with his hand, and ejaculated :

'El Khamdou.'

In this pose he resembled Jupiter ready to let the lightning escape from his all-powerful hand.

To tell the truth, this Mir Hadji Fethali, son of Ismael, was a very distinguished sage.

When he began to speak it was as though the murmur of a stream or the song of a nightingale were heard : each of his words had, on those around, the charm of a dissolving pastille ; and among all the inhabitants of Daghestan not a single effendi understood one half of what he said. The interpreter to the Governor of Derbend, Mirza Ali himself, who had swallowed, digested, and rendered in commentaries all the poets of Farzistan, after having conversed with him for more than two hours, had concluded by saying :

'I can make nothing of him.'

This, in Tartar, corresponds to the Russian

expression, which I believe to be also used in French :

‘ I give my tongue to the dogs.’

On this occasion our orator had taken the trouble to make himself clear ; consequently, he had been understood by everyone, which was only appropriate in an assembly of this importance. His discourse had produced the greatest effect on his hearers. They stood round him in respect mingled with awe, whilst on all sides were heard murmured these words : ‘ He is right, he has spoken the truth ; ’ and all, like bees, regaled him with the honey of their adulation.

Then, addressing himself again to his auditors with the confidence imparted by his first success, he said :

‘ Listen, my brethren. We are all culpable in the eyes of Allah, and I the foremost. Our sins have soared to the third heaven, but happily there are seven, so four remain in which the pity of God has taken refuge. He punishes the innocent with the guilty, but sometimes He also spares a whole race for one saint. Well, I am going to propose something ; will you accept it ? I know nothing about it ; anyhow, I give it to you for what it is worth. This is not the first time that Daghestan has needed water.

Well, our fathers and our grandfathers, who were wiser than we, were accustomed under such circumstances to choose from the youthful Mussulmen a lad pure in soul and body. He was sent with prayer and universal benediction to the summit of the mountain nearest to Allah, for instance to the summit of Shah-Dagh. There he had to pray with the fervour of a man who prays for a whole race, and taking some snow in a clean ewer, without letting it touch the ground, he carried it to Derbend. Finally, at Derbend, he poured this melted snow into the sea. God is great ! Hardly had the snow of Shah-Dagh mingled with the waters of the Caspian Sea, than the clouds gathered over the spot and the rain fell in torrents, restoring life to the parched earth.'

'It is true, it is true,' cried everybody. 'I have myself heard of this from my father,' said some, 'and I from my grandfather,' said others.

'And I—I have seen it,' said an old man coming forward. He had a long white beard of which only the end was dyed red.

All made way for him and gave ear to what follows :

'It was my brother,' continued the old man, 'who went to fetch the snow. The miracle was accomplished, the water of the Caspian Sea became

fresh like milk ; the drops of rain were as large as a silver rouble, and never within the memory of man was there so fine a harvest as that year.'

The old man held his peace.

Then there was only one cry :

' A messenger must be chosen, the choice must be made at once, and he must be sent to Shah-Dagh without a moment's delay.'

' To Shah-Dagh ! to Shah-Dagh ! ' cried all the voices.

Like a train of gunpowder the words ran through the town, and Derbend cried with one voice, like an echo of the mosque :

' To Shah-Dagh ! to Shah-Dagh ! '

The clue to the great enigma was solved. The means of assuring rain being thus at last known, everybody jumped with joy and grew jubilant.

The rich appeared especially delighted at the discovery of a remedy which did not cost a kopeck.

None appreciate economy like the rich.

The youths said, with pride : ' One of us will be chosen ; it is on one of us that the fate of Derbend depends.'

But where in Derbend could be found this youth pure in soul and body ?

Among all races it would be difficult—but among Asiatics !

The inhabitants of Derbend were much exercised with this reflection, and the first exuberance of their joy abated. Where, indeed, could be found this innocent young man, who did not yet know either the taste of wine or the sweetness of a kiss ?

A serious discussion arose over the selection : first one was suggested, then another. But this one was too young, and that one too inexperienced ; the first had no moustache, the second had grown one too big. It was a difficult matter to arrange.

What is hinted above is not altogether to the credit of the inhabitants of Derbend. But, I repeat, I am relating facts—truth before everything.

If this had been a novel, by Jove ! how quickly my hero would have been found.

‘ We must select Sophar Kouli,’ said some, ‘ he is timid as a young girl, so timid that, fearing no one knows what, he was seen three days ago jumping at daybreak from the terrace of a neighbour into the street, and immediately running into his own house he double-locked the door.’

‘ Or Mourad Amur. He lives as quietly and as solitary as a lily.’

But it was affirmed that, not a month before, he

had gone home after a visit to the apothecary, holding a bottle of balsam in each hand ; and subsequently the immaculate lily had sung songs, at hearing which the devils themselves would have put their fingers in their ears

There was still Mahomet Rassoul. Certainly evil could not be spoken of him, though it might be thought. He had in his house a charming Lesgian maiden whom he had bought for twenty roubles from her father, and for whom he had since refused a hundred. After all, he was a man : a steel sword sometimes gets rusty.

The search proved fruitless : too much was said for one youth or too much was said about another.

Melancholy began to take possession of the inhabitants of Derbend, and under these circumstances it is only one step from melancholy to despair.

‘ And Iskander Bey ? ’ said a voice in the crowd.

‘ Iskander Bey ; true. Iskander Bey is good, perfect. How could we forget him ? Iskander Bey, incomprehensible, incredible ! A rose might as well be forgotten in a bouquet, a pomegranate in a basket of fruit. Allah, Allah—the heat is turning our brains.’

‘ Well,’ observed someone, ‘ thanks be to Allah

we have found our lad. Why should we waste time chattering? Call Iskander Bey.'

'Call Iskander Bey,' echoed the crowd.

'Iskander Bey! Iskander Bey! Hullo there, Iskander Bey!'

'Really we are saved,' was heard on every side; 'the dear Iskander Bey; the honest Iskander Bey; the brave Iskander Bey. He hardly eats anything, he does not drink, he has no friendship for the giaours. I cannot remember ever meeting him in the gardens. Has any one ever seen him look at a woman?'

'Have you?'

'No.'

'And you?'

'No, he lives as solitary as the moon.'

'Well, but why not go to Iskander Bey?' cried several voices.

'But we cannot go like this to Iskander Bey.'

'Why not?'

'Because he is so serious that no one knows how to approach him; so proud that he will only be addressed in reply to his own words; so taciturn that it might be thought each word cost him a rouble. Which of you have ever seen him laugh, eh?'

'Not I.'

‘Not I.’

‘Nor I. We must think twice before seeking him.’

‘Only one man can run the risk,’ said somebody.

And all the voices replied :

‘The man is Mir Hadji Fethali, son of Ismael. Let he who gave the advice finish the task.’

‘Go, Mir Hadji, go,’ cried the assembly ; ‘beg Iskander from all of us—obtain this boon from him. It will not be difficult, for you are so eloquent.’

Hadji Fethali was not enraptured with the honour thrust upon him, but he finally consented to be the ambassador of the community. He was given two Beys to escort him : the fat Hussein and the thin Fersali ; these were the two adjectives without which this substantive of modern literature could not move.

The deputation departed.

‘Ah,’ said the crowd, ‘all goes well.’

‘I feel quite happy now,’ observed someone. ‘It is just as if Iskander had accepted.’

‘If Fethali wishes, he is quite certain to succeed,’ remarked another voice.

‘He could obtain half the beard of a giaour.’

‘He is more wily than the devil.’

‘A very respectable man.’

‘He has so much wit.’

‘He could make a serpent dance on its tail.’

‘Ah! What eloquence when he speaks : they are not words that fall from his lips.’

‘They are flowers.’

‘There is not even time for our ears to gather them.’

‘He would deceive you into being condemned for the pleasure of being deceived by him.’

‘Only he would not be the man to send to fetch the snow from Shah-Dagh.’

‘He is not chaste enough for that.’

‘Nor sober enough.’

‘Nor brave enough.’

‘Nor——’

With your permission we will there cut short this eulogy of Mir Hadji Fethali. We are not among those who, having washed the eyes of a man with rose water, as the Tartars say, give him an acid with which to anoint them, a scorpion to eat for a cherry, or the flower of wolf’s bane to inhale for a branch of jessamine.

CHAPTER III

ISKANDER BEY

Without thee, beloved, the spring of my life fades.

THE respectable Hadji Fethali walked slowly whilst climbing the steep street which led to the upper part of the town, where the house of Iskander Bey was situated. In the roads where three could walk abreast his two honourable companions moved beside him. But from time to time they were obliged to pass through streets so narrow that they had to pause and walk behind him in single file. This humiliation they were eager to remove whenever the road again became practicable for three to walk abreast. From time to time one or other would try to open conversation with him. But he was so preoccupied that he did not hear and did not answer, yet at the same time so absent-minded, he did not notice that in expectorating to right and left he spat first into

the black beard of Hussein and then into the pink beard of Fersali.

This abstraction was so prolonged that at last his two companions began to get angry.

‘This is an extraordinary man,’ said Hussein; ‘you speak to him and, instead of replying, he spits.’

‘May the mud stick in his throat!’ replied Fersali, wiping his beard. ‘The proverb truly says, Hussein, that if the master be at home, it is sufficient to utter his name and the door is opened; but if he is absent you will obtain nothing by breaking it open. It is quite useless to speak to Mir Hadji Fethali—his mind is elsewhere, the house is empty.’

Fersali with the pink beard was so called in Derbend because, instead of employing the two substances used by the Tartars to dye beards—the first of which dyed the beard pink, and the second ultimately dyed it black—he only used the first and consequently kept his beard at the hue of dawn on the horizon. Fersali was mistaken. The house was not empty. On the contrary Hadji Fethali was so full of his own thoughts and their clashing created such confusion that he could not even hear the voice of his own mind, much less the voice of anyone else.

This is what his thoughts said to him :

‘Take care, Fethali. Every step you take towards the abode of Iskander brings you nearer to danger. Remember how grievously you have offended him, and how little time has elapsed since the offence. Take care, Hadji Fethali, take care.’

There certainly existed some cause for the pre-occupation of the prudent speaker, who knew Iskander.

What had passed between Hadji Fethali and Iskander Bey?

I am going to tell you, but it will be in confidence, will it not?

Iskander Bey was born in Derbend, when the town was already in the possession of the Russians. This occupation dates from 1795, but his father had been the bosom friend of the last Khan, who was hunted from his country by the Russian army of Catherine. In 1826, when he expected the Persians at Derbend, he died of grief at their repulse at Kuba, against which they had advanced. When dying he had told his son, then aged fifteen, never to serve the Russians and never to make friends with the inhabitants of Derbend, who had repulsed the Persians. He was dead, but his beliefs, his habits, his opinions, all revived in the son. His ideas, his thoughts, his desires were all opposed to the desires, the thoughts,

and the ideas of the inhabitants of Derbend. A handful of rice, a glass of water, a little light, much fresh air, were all that young Iskander Bey required.

In the spring, when the whole world wakes at the breath of love and poetry, he saddled his good Karabachian horse, threw over his shoulder the beautiful gun of Hadji Moustaf, the most celebrated armourer of Daghestan, and took on his wrist his hardy golden falcon. Over mountains and valleys the falcon flew until it fell with fatigue—that is if fatigue can ever be felt in the gratification of a passion. Then he dismounted from his horse, which he allowed to wander at liberty, and lying down to rest under the shade of a great tree on the edge of a stream, slept peacefully, lulled by its murmur. If this sweet harmony made him dream, if his dreams were realities, if he was poet or philosopher, dreamer or reasoner, I do not know. What I do know is that he lived by realising that he was alive, and what more could you want?

In winter, when the snow, driven by the wind, beat against the windows, he liked to hear the roaring of the blast in the chimney, whilst stretched out on his carpet he followed the play of the embers on his hearth, or the undulations of the smoke from his pipe. Did he see in the embers the faces of

devils—did he see in his pipe the wings of angels? He told himself so. The fact is, he lived in a nameless kingdom, of which he was the ruler. He rummaged in bushels of emeralds, of pearls, and diamonds. He carried off women beside which the green, yellow, and blue houris promised by Mahomet to the true believers were but Kalmouks and Samoyards. He threw himself into imaginary dangers, fought with gnomes, giants, or enchanters, fell asleep in the midst of the phantoms of his fantasy, and woke in the morning so confused between the ideal and the real that he did not know if he had been living or dreaming.

Occasionally, too, he would call his nouker (groom) a Lesgian, and make him sing the Lesgian songs of the liberty of his brethren in their mountains and their courage in battle or in the chase. Then his Asiatic heart swelled, he clutched his dagger whilst trying the point, his schaska whilst sharpening the blade, and murmured to himself :

‘ Shall I never have a chance of fighting ? ’

The desire was not left long ungratified.

Kari Mollah came to besiege Derbend. It was a fine opportunity for brave men to test their strength.

Iskander Bey did not let it escape.

He made sorties with the Tartars, mounted on

his fine Karabachian steed, which feared neither rock nor abyss, and he was always foremost and the first. To join him was sometimes possible ; to pass him, never. He did not gallop, he flew like an eagle, spreading death, first from afar with his gun, then throwing the discharged musket from his shoulder and hurling himself on the enemy with raised kanjiar and savage yells. So there was no choice but to follow ; behind him were to be found the open ranks of the mountaineers, and the foe retreated as they would before an eruption of lava.

One day after the mountaineers had been routed in the direction of Kuba and dislodged from a vineyard, the Tartars were retreating in disorder despite their success, but with two heads cut off and fastened to a flag taken from the enemy, according to Asiatic custom.

The Russian troops had already returned to the town, but a young Russian officer and a few Tartars, among them being Iskander Bey, remained near the fountain. Bullets and balls whistled round them, whilst the Russian officer was drinking the fresh and limpid water. Raising his head, he saw Iskander Bey in a simple bechmett (close-fitting coat) of white satin, the sleeves turned back showing his hands and his arms red with blood to the elbow.

He was resting on his gun, his lips curled with disdain, his eye moist with a noble tear—in fact, with rage.

‘What is the matter, Iskander?’ asked the Russian officer; ‘it seems to me you have done your part of the task well and that you need have no regrets.’

‘White-livered cowards,’ he muttered, ‘they march slowly enough when it means advancing, but in retreating they fly like veritable wild goats.’

‘Well, it seems to me the victory is ours,’ said the young Russian.

‘No doubt it is ours, but we have left poor Ismail behind.’

‘Ismail!’ asked the Russian officer; ‘was he the pretty boy who begged me to give him a few cartridges at the beginning of the fight?’

‘Yes. In all Derbend he was the only soul I loved. He had an angel’s heart. He is lost.’

He wiped the solitary tear which trembled on his eyelid and which hesitated to fall.

‘Is he taken?’ asked the Russian officer.

‘He is dead,’ replied Iskander. ‘Braver than a man, he had all a child’s imprudence. He wished to pluck a bunch of grapes and traversed the space to

the vine. There he lost his head. Before my eyes, the Lesgians cut off his head and I was not able to rescue him. I had to deal with ten men ; I killed three, it was all I could do. At this moment we retreated. They insulted his body—the brutes. Come !’ he cried, turning to the three or four Tartars who were listening, ‘ which of you has still any love, faith, or courage in his heart ; That man will come with me to rescue a comrade’s body.’

‘ I will go with you,’ said the Russian officer.

‘ Let us go too,’ said two Tartars.

All four threw themselves into the midst of the Lesgians, who, not expecting this sudden attack, and believing that the four men were followed by a much greater number, retreated before them until they reached the body of the lad, which they seized and brought back to the town.

The mother was waiting at the gate, and threw herself on the headless corpse with cries and groans and sobs which would touch any heart.

Iskander looked at her with knitted brows, a single teardrop no longer trembling on his eyelash, but with quick-flowing tears, like the water of a stream, inundating his face.

The mother’s despair melted this lion-hearted youth,

‘What a misfortune you are not a Russian!’ said the officer, holding out his hand.

‘How fortunate you are not a Tartar!’ replied Iskander, as he wrung it.

It is well known that if moustaches are the sign of puberty, they are also the precursor of love.

Iskander had not escaped the general law. Every hair of his moustache was born on his lip at the same time that a desire was born in his heart—a desire still vague, inexplicable to himself, but resembling branches of oranges, which carry both flower and fruit on the same bough. Why do women like moustaches? Because they are symbols of love, born at the same time, curling with the ardour of desire. What does this young man want, with his head in the air and his fair complexion, with the smiling face and the red lips under the budding moustache?

Neither honours, nor fortune, but only a kiss.

A virgin moustache is a bridge thrown between two loving lips. A moustache —

Let us leave moustaches, they lead us too far. Besides, when one’s own moustache is grizzled, why talk of dark or fair moustaches?

Besides, moustaches, of no matter what colour, divert me from my theme.

I therefore resume.

In the preceding April, Iskander had departed to hunt, according to his custom. It was a beautiful spring day, not without sun, fresh without being damp. Iskander rode through an expanse of verdure and flowers. For several hours he had been going from cave to cave, from mountain to mountain. He sought something he missed, without knowing what it was he sought. For the first time the air seemed heavy to breathe; for the first time his heart palpitated without cause, and his troubled chest rose and fell like the veil of a woman.

Talking of veils, let us note one fact.

Formerly, when Iskander walked through the streets of Derbend, he never would even have glanced at a woman had she uncovered to her girdle; whilst from the day that he first curled the extremity of his little black moustache between his fingers, every tip of a nose, every rosy lip, every brown or blue eye of which he caught a glimpse through an opening in a veil, made him alternately freeze and burn. Certainly he had never studied anatomy and yet, in spite of his ignorance, he could picture to himself a woman from the tip of her slipper to the top of her veil not only without a mistake, but without an omission,

and this after seeing no more than a little foot in a velvet slipper below Turkish trousers trimmed with gold or silver braid.

I shall not tell you this time if the sport was good. What I will tell you is that the sportsman was absent-minded ; so much so that, instead of looking in the solitary places where pheasants and partridges are generally to be found, he guided his horse to two or three aouls where he had absolutely no chance of sport.

But the day was fine and whether standing at their doors or seated on their roofs, he hoped to catch a glimpse of those pretty little contemporary animals which he reconstructed with the preciseness that Cuvier reconstructed a mastodon, an ichthyosaurus, a pterodactyl, or any other antediluvian monster.

Unfortunately he had not been able to become acquainted with the specimens already known. Women were at their doors, women were on their terraces ; but Mussulmen women, who sometimes discard their veils for the giaours, never discard them for their fellow-countrymen. The result was that the desires of Iskander, not finding one face on which to look, were wasted on the air.

The young man grew sad, heaved a deep sigh,

threw the bridle on the neck of his horse, and let it lead him where it chose—which is a plan all travellers and lovers should adopt when they have an intelligent horse.

The horse knew a lovely road which led home. Alongside the road was a running brook forming a basin under huge plane trees, where the animal was wont to quench his thirst. He took this road.

Iskander Bey did not pay any attention to the road his horse was taking.

It mattered little to him : he rode in a dream.

At the same time all sorts of visions flitted by on both sides of the road. These were of women, who all wore veils, it is true, but wore them so carelessly that not one failed to reveal what it was intended to conceal.

All at once Iskander Bey stopped his horse. He seemed to pass from dreamland to reality.

By the side of the stream reclined a girl, aged about fifteen or sixteen, more beautiful than he had ever imagined a woman could be. She was bathing her lovely face, which the April sun had coloured like a rose, in the pure water. Then she looked at herself in the moving mirror of the brook, smiling at what she saw, and seemed so pleased at seeing herself smile that she saw nothing else, neither heeding nor

hearing anything but the singing of the birds above her head, which seemed to say :

‘Admire yourself in the fountain, O beautiful child! No flower so fresh as you ever admired itself before, and none so fresh will admire itself after you.’

No doubt they said that to her in verse, but I am obliged to repeat it in prose, not knowing the rules of poetry in the language of birds.

Those feathered flatterers were right, for it would be difficult to find a fairer or purer flower than the one which appeared to have shot up beside the water in which she admired herself.

But she was one of those flowers which Grandville knew so well how to make—with dark hair and eyes resembling stars, teeth like pearls, and cheeks like peaches. She was enveloped in no thick and badly donned veil, which hid what it covered, but in a veil of a texture so fine, so silky, and so transparent that it seemed woven with those threads which a virgin lets fall from her distaff when autumn is reached.

But if an indiscreet eye descended from her face in a straight line, it was quite another story. After a neck which might have served as a model to the ivory tower in history, came——

No doubt what came below, and was partially

hidden by a chemise of white silk stitched with blue, and an arkabouke of pink satin, was very beautiful, for poor Iskander was not able to repress a cry of admiration. Hardly had the exclamation escaped him, than he wished he had been born dumb. He had just driven himself from Paradise.

The girl had heard his cry ; she looked round, uttered a cry in her turn, whilst throwing a thick veil over the transparent one and ran—or rather flew—away, twice letting the name of Iskander Bey escape her lips.

He, silent too late, immovable when perhaps he ought to have given chase, his arms stretched out as though to stop this reality, which in flying again became a vision, remained breathless, with fixed gaze, like Apollo watching Daphne.

Apollo very soon set off in pursuit of the beautiful nymph, but Iskander did not stir so long as he could catch a glimpse of her white veil through the bushes.

When he could see it no more, he felt quite different, for it seemed to him as if life, suspended for a few minutes, had returned and rushed boisterously and violently into his brain.

‘Allah!’ he murmured, ‘what will people say of her or of me if we have been seen? How beautiful

she is! She will be scolded by her parents. What lovely dark eyes! People will think we had an assignation. What lips! She knows my name. Twice, in running away, she said "Iskander!"'

He again fell into a reverie, if the term reverie can be applied to a state when the blood flows, when celestial harps are heard, and all the stars in the sky can be seen in the middle of the day.

Certainly the night would have overtaken Iskander by the edge of the brook, into the waters of which he seemed to have dropped his heart, if the horse had not felt the bridle, lately tightened, gently loosened, and had gone on his way without asking the advice of his owner.

His owner came home madly in love.

We regret to have been unable to find time or space in this chapter to explain why Iskander Bey was so angry with Hadji Fethali, but we promise that our readers shall be told in our next.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEREIN ISKANDER LEARNS THE NAME OF
THE MAIDEN WHO KNEW HIS.

I have plunged into the depths of the sea,
And I have found there the pearl which I sought.

ISKANDER BEY nevertheless remembered the words of his father.

His father had been wont to say :

‘The most beautiful rose lasts one day ; the smallest thorn lasts all through life.

‘Caress women, but do not love them unless you wish to become their slave.

‘Love is only sweet in songs. In reality, it begins with fear, continues in sin, and ends with repentance.’

To these three sentences he used to add a fourth : their necessary complement.

‘Do not look at other men’s wives ; do not listen to your own.’

We hasten to record, to the credit of Iskander, that he forgot all this advice in five minutes.

The young Tartar loved and feared. The first part of the prediction of his father, 'Love begins with fear,' was fulfilled in him.

Only three days before, poor Iskander slept so tranquilly that the night seemed as short as it was refreshing.

Now he tossed on his mattress and bit his pillow : the silken covering stifled him.

'But who was *she* ?'

At this question, which he put to himself for the tenth time, Iskander sprang from his mattress to his feet.

She ! What a horrible word !

Love cannot tolerate pronouns, especially love in Daghestan.

Until he could discover her real name, Iskander would give her a fictitious one.

'I will know the name of my——Leila,' he said as he attached his kanjar to his belt. 'I may die perhaps but I will find out her name.'

A moment later he was in the street.

Probably the devil left one of his serpents in Derbend. To some it is the serpent of ambition.

How many famous men have disputed for the possession of Derbend !

To others it is the serpent of love.

How many young people have lost their hearts
in Derbend !

It was decidedly this latter serpent which had
bitten Iskander Bey.

He wandered through all the streets, peered into
all the doors, and his eyes endeavoured to pierce
every wall and every veil.

All proved useless.

Of whom ask her name? Who could point out
her abode ?

The curiosity at his heart urged him on.

'Go,' it bade him.

'Whither?' He did not know.

He mingled with the crowd. The crowd brought
him to the market-place.

If he wished to know the price of meat, he was in
an excellent place. But to find out the name of his
beloved—No.

He approached an Armenian. Armenians know
everybody and sell everything.

This one sold fish.

'Buy a fine chamaia?' said the Armenian to
Iskander Bey.

The young man walked away in disgust.

He at length approached the shop of a Tartar
jeweller, a dexterous enameller.

‘Allah verrine kemak!’—‘May God bless you,’ said he to the Tartar.

‘May Allah grant you happiness,’ answered the jeweller, without removing his eyes from the turquoise he was mounting in a ring.

On the table behind which the jeweller toiled was a copper bowl full of different articles more or less precious.

Iskander Bey uttered a cry.

He had just recognised an earring which he was certain he had seen hanging from the ear of his unknown on the previous day.

His heart leapt. It seemed to him that he had discovered the first letter of her name.

It was as though he had seen her pretty little hand, with its pink nails, beckoning him to approach.

He dared not utter a word, he hesitated to put a question, he did not know what to say: his voice trembled, all his ideas seemed convulsed.

Suddenly an inspiration flashed across his brain.

A real military bit of strategy—one by which a town is taken.

He emptied the bowl into his hand, as though to examine the jewels. The jeweller, who had recognised him, left him to his devices.

He withdrew the earring from the heap of jewels

with dexterity, slipped it into his pocket, and suddenly :

‘There!’ said he, ‘I have dropped the earring,’ and he replaced all the other jewels in the bowl.

‘Which earring?’ asked the merchant.

‘The one with the tiny bells.’

By Allah, pick it up quick, Iskander ; I would not lose it for fifty roubles.’

‘Oh, it is not lost,’ said Iskander.

Then, a minute later :

‘All the same, it is very strange I do not see it.’

‘The road slopes,’ said the merchant, laying down the ring he was chasing, rising and looking over his wares, whilst settling his spectacles.

Iskander moved a few steps, pretending to search.

‘I cannot find it,’ he said.

Again, after a minute :

‘Most certainly it is lost.’

This time the jeweller took off his glasses and placed them on the table.

‘Allah ! What have you done, Iskander Bey ?’

‘I have managed to lose your earring, that is all.’

‘But you do not know what will happen to me. That old scoundrel of a Hadji Fethali is capable of making me pay for an earring in Bakou enamel.’

‘Upon my soul, you are mocking me, Djaffar.

What are you saying? A man as serious as the Hadji Fethali, a descendant of Mahomet, a saint, would never wear earrings.'

'And who said he wore earrings?'

'He has no wife or daughter—at least so far as I know.'

'He is too stingy for that, the old miser. But it is now about ten years since his brother Chafy fled to Persia, leaving him his wife and daughter. The little one was six then ; she is now sixteen.'

'That's all right,' murmured Iskander to himself.

Then aloud :

'And what is the name of this niece?'

'Kanina,' replied the jeweller.

'Kanina, Kanina,' he repeated softly to himself, and the name seemed much more pretty than that of Leila, which he at once threw away as a lemon from which all the juice is extracted.

'Since the departure of her father,' observed Iskander, 'I presume the little one has grown.'

'You know our land, Iskander. A child of one appears two, a girl of five seems to be ten : our young maidens are like the tendrils of the vine, hardly planted before the grape is ripe. I have never seen her, but I have heard it said that she is the loveliest maid in Derbend.'

Iskander Bey flung the earring into the hand of the jeweller and departed like an arrow. He had learnt all he desired : the name and the abode of his fair one.

He ran straight to the house of Hadji Fethali. He did not hope to see Kanina, but perhaps he would hear her voice, since he knew she would probably go out with her mother when, if he did not see her, she would see him.

She would guess he had not come to see her uncle.

As usual the house of the venerable Hadji Fethali was closed. He was quite prepared for this check. It was the most difficult house in all Derbend to enter.

He did not hear the voice of Kanina, but the barking of a dog, which was renewed every time he approached the door.

At last the door was opened.

But an old hag, holding a broom in her hand, alone came out.

No doubt a witch going to keep the Sabbath.

She had not even to take the trouble to shut the door behind her. The door shut of itself, or so it might be thought, had not a hand been heard pushing the bolts.

He made up his mind to stay there till night, till

to-morrow morning, until Kanina should come out, but his presence could not fail to attract attention, and his presence clearly said : ' Hadji Fethali, I love your niece ; conceal her more closely than ever.'

He returned home and threw himself on his carpet.

There, as he had no further fear of being seen or even heard, he rolled, he roared, he howled.

Iskander loved as a lion loves.

The good Mussulmen, the true believers, have no idea of what we call perfect love.

Iskander was simply maddened. He wanted Kanina at that very hour, without delay, at once.

He was one of those readers who skip the preface to a book and pass at once to the first chapter.

A terrible race for authors and uncles.

But Iskander soon said to himself that he might roll all day on his carpet, roar a whole week, and howl an entire month without bringing himself a hair's breadth nearer to Kanina.

Some plan must therefore be sought.

At length, by dint of saying to himself, ' Kanina's uncle, Kanina's uncle,' he remembered that, though he had not an uncle, he had an aunt.

An aunt ! Why are aunts created if not to protect the love affairs of their nephews ?

That is the only use for an aunt.

You do not know an aunt who has ever been of any other use? No more do I.

He bought silken material for a dress and rushed to his aunt's house.

The aunt took the gift, heard all her nephew's love story and, as every aunt, however old, remembers the time when she was young, the aunt of Iskander heaved a sigh for her lost youth and promised to do her best to bring about an interview.

'Come to me to-morrow at noon, my child,' she said. 'I will send for Kanina under the pretext of painting her eye-lashes with kohol. I will hide you behind that curtain, only be good, you rogue: do not move, do not breathe, and above all do not mention to a soul in the whole world what I am doing for you.'

Iskander, as may be guessed, went home quite joyous.

He retired to bed at sunset hoping to sleep, and that while he slept the time would glide by.

That would have been easy enough in former days.

He went to sleep at one and woke at two.

By seven in the morning he was with his aunt, assuring her it was on the stroke of noon.

At every sound near the door, he ran to hide behind the curtain.

Then he resumed his seat near his aunt, and, shaking his head, declared :

‘ She will not come.’

Then, becoming angry and stamping his foot :

‘ Oh, if she does not come, I will set fire to her uncle’s house. She must come out to avoid being burnt. Then I will seize her, I will lift her on to my Karabachian horse, and I will flee with her.’

Each time his aunt calmed him, saying :

‘ It could not be her ; it is only nine o’clock, it is only ten, it is only eleven.’

But at noon :

‘ This time, here she is.’

Iskander, like his aunt, had heard the little heeled slipper resounding on the pavement of the courtyard, and had bounded behind the curtain.

It was actually she, with her friend Kitçhina—Kitchina of the blue eyes, as she was called.

The young girls took off their slippers at the threshold and seated themselves near the old aunt.

The two veils fell to the floor.

The curtain quivered, but fortunately neither of the maidens looked in that direction.

No, they watched the aunt, who stirred the kohol in a little silver basin with an ivory stick.

Kanina knelt before the old lady, who began to paint her eyebrows and then her eyelids, but when Kanina lifted her beautiful eyes for the latter operation, Iskander felt his heart pierced as by a bullet.

The old dame was herself struck by the marvellous beauty, and in her admiration for the girl she said as she embraced her :

‘How soon, my pretty Kanina, shall I be painting you in your bath, amid the songs of your friends? You have such lovely eyes that I hope they may open each morning without tears and close each night with a kiss.’

Kanina heaved a sigh, and tenderly embraced the old dame.

Iskander heard the sigh, and felt the warmth of the kiss.

‘My uncle Fethali says I am still too young,’ replied Kanina sadly.

‘And what does your heart say?’ asked the elder.

Kanina took the tambourine from the wall, and instead of answering sang :

Fair dawn, why on the plumes of your wing
Have I felt the freshness of morning ?
Fair youth, why with the fire of your eyes
Have you to-night inflamed my heart ?

Why when in a cloudless sky I have seen
Glistening a star, the emblem of God ;
Why, when amid the storm glitters
The lightning, that serpent of flame ;
Why ills that are feared, or benefits desired
Which form the joy and terror of the world—
Why are all forgot, sun, lightning, dawn ?
But yet I have not forgotten your eyes.

Whilst singing the last verse of the song she had improvised, Kanina blushed to her shoulders ; then, laughing like a child, she ran to hang up the tambourine and threw herself into the arms of her friend. At which the two girls began to laugh together.

What were they laughing at ? What was there to laugh at in all that ?

But the aunt understood quite well, and for the benefit of her nephew she determined she would be immediately given the secret of the enigma.

‘ Oh, my scent of roses,’ she said, playing with Kanina’s rings, ‘ if my nephew could have heard the song you have just sung, he would have rent the wall with his chest to see the singer, and when he had seen her, he would have carried her off as a lion bears away a goat.’

The vase filled with jasmin-water fell at this moment from the coffer near the curtain, and was broken to pieces.

The old woman turned round ; the two girls grew pale.

‘What is this noise?’ asked Kanina in tremulous accents.

‘That beast of a black cat never does anything else,’ answered the old dame.

Kanina grew reassured.

‘Oh, I detest black cats,’ she observed, ‘it is said that they sometimes lend their skins to the devil, and that is why their eyes shine so at night.’

Then turning to her friend :

‘Come, Kitchina,’ she added, ‘mother only allowed me one hour, and there is the cry of the Mollah.’

Kanina embraced the old woman coldly, but, guessing that this coldness was assumed :

‘Never mind,’ said the aunt, going with the girl to the door. ‘You may be vexed if you choose, Kanina ; I should like to see you with flowers on your head. Your happiness is as dear to me as a thread of gold, and, speaking of gold thread, I know a man who longs to join his soul to yours, and rest assured, my child, only Allah and I are aware of it.’

Kanina opened her large eyes, to which astonishment imparted double the size ; but at this moment she was on the threshold, her friend, who was behind, gently pushed her, the door closed, and instead of an explanation she only heard the noise of the key grinding in the lock.

Iskander Bey almost stifled his aunt in his arms when she returned from showing Kanina out. The worthy woman freely reproached him for not having stayed quiet in his nook of observation.

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘when that accursed vase fell, I almost died of terror. Bad boy, you would have thrown the earth of my grave upon my head if Kanina had perceived the cause of the fall.’

‘Could I help it, aunt?’ cried Iskander. ‘How could I remain quiet, when my heart threatened to burst at the sight of the blush spreading on the white cheek of Kanina, after you had breathed my name? I made a movement to cull it with my lips. What would you have? He who sows must reap.’

‘Not when we sow in the garden of another.’

‘Buy the garden for me, then, aunt. Do not let me die like a nightingale under the thorn of a rosebud. Kanina must be my wife ; ask for her without loss of time from her uncle and know, dear aunt, I am as grateful as I am deep in love. If you succeed

in your embassy I promise you the finest pair of oxen in Daghestan.'

Next morning Iskander Bey received the answer of Mir Hadji Fethali.

Alas! it was far from being what he desired.

Here it is, so that the reader may at least judge of the hope left for poor Iskander.

'Say from me to Iskander,' he had replied to the old aunt, 'that I have not forgotten his father. His father was a brute. One day, before everyone, he called me—— I will not repeat what he called me. I was not able to avenge myself because it was the time when the Russian power interfered with our customs. But I have not forgotten the offence. I was not able to burn his coffin. The son shall pay the debt of his father, and I am not a dog to caress him who beats me. But to tell the truth, if there had not been this affront between us, Iskander should not any the more have my niece. As for the proud position of being uncle to this Bey, there are in Derbend seventy Beys like him. I will reckon with him when he likes to talk to me of dowry. Yes, no doubt by ruining himself he could pay for my niece, but then how could he live with her? Has he parents to help him in case of need? How many crow's eggs does he receive as rent of his hovels? How many

trusses of nettles does he reap in his fields? He is worthless, quite worthless, your rascal of a nephew. Therefore tell him "No," a hundred times "No." I do not want good-for-nothings like him in my family, with a head and a purse so empty that the first breath of wind will blow head and purse away. Good-night.'

With the temperament you know Iskander Bey to possess, you can understand his fury when his aunt gave this answer word for word.

At length his rage abated. He had just taken his oath to revenge himself on Mir Hadji Fethali in a terrible manner.

He was a Tartar.

This will explain to you why Hadji Fethali was so preoccupied as he ascended the street that led to the abode of Iskander Bey ; why, in his preoccupation he spat on the black beard of Hussein and on the pink beard of Fersali, and finally, why, when he reached the door of Iskander Bey, instead of knocking impatiently, he tapped quite gently.

CHAPTER V.

SLEEPING, SLEEPING.

There is no smoke without fire.—*Tartar Proverb.*

ISKANDER was neither rich nor married. His door therefore easily opened, not half way but wide, for he had no fear that those entering should see his wife or his strong-box.

Iskander was also in the habit of receiving visitors in the most distant room, instead of on the threshold like the Mussulman father of a family. He had nothing which could tempt the robber of hearts or of silver.

‘Be welcome,’ he cried from the other side of the door to all comers, before he even knew who they were.

The door was opened.

His nouker being busy doctoring his horse, Iskander Bey came himself to open the door, and stood thunderstruck at seeing Mir Hadji Fethali and his two supporters.

The blood rushed to his head, and his first movement was to put his hand on his sword.

But, thanks to a violent effort, curiosity repressed wrath.

He respectfully placed his hand on his heart, saluted his guests, and invited them to enter.

They seated themselves on the carpets, stroking their beards with Oriental dignity and smoothing the folds of their garments.

The conversation began with commonplace remarks.

After five minutes wasted in insignificant phrases, Mir Hadji Fethali at length came to the point.

He spoke of the calamity which menaced Daghestan in general, and Derbend in particular, if this drought lasted only eight more days.

At each period, he turned towards his companions as if begging their support ; but they, in their turn, remained silent, and if they did not spit on his beard it was not because they lacked the will.

Iskander on his side appeared little affected by the pathetic picture Mir Hadji Fethali drew of the woes of the town and the province, but from the scarlet hue of his face it could be seen that a flame burnt in his heart.

So it resulted in Hadji Fethali terminating his discourse with this threefold exclamation :

‘Woe, woe, woe to Derbend !’

‘Probably,’ answered Iskander.

‘Certainly,’ added Hussein.

‘Absolutely,’ moaned Fersali.

After which a momentary silence ensued.

During the silence, Iskander looked at his visitors one after the other, with interrogation in his glance ; but they held their peace.

Iskander began to grow impatient.

‘You have not come here, my friends,’ he said to them, ‘for us to wipe our perspiration and mingle our tears together. I presume on your part and on the part of those who sent you, for you have the appearance of being delegates to my august self, you have something to communicate of more importance than what you have yet said.’

‘My brother is full of penetration,’ replied Hadji Fethali, with a bow.

Then, with a mass of Oriental periphrase on the honour done to him in being selected for such a purpose, he informed Iskander what the inhabitants of Derbend expected from his devotion.

But at this the eyebrows of Iskander were raised in terrible fashion.

‘Strange!’ he cried, with vehemence. ‘Until now the inhabitants of Derbend, for whom I have already fought enough—it is true I would rather fight again for myself than for them—not only have not spoken to me, but have barely saluted me. And now they actually entrust me with a commission which I have not sought and of which I am unworthy. It is true there are many precipices on Shah-Dagh. It is true that Shah-Dagh is the habitual residence of the brigand Mollah Nour. It is two to one I fall down a precipice, and twenty to one I am assassinated by the Mollah Nour. But it does not matter to them. I may be useful in this way, and therefore they have selected me. Why, I pray you, should I who love the heat and the sun, ask Allah for clouds and rain? On the contrary, I am delighted that my house is dry, my stable healthy, and that there is neither mist in the air nor mud in the street. The sun also hatches my crow’s eggs, and my nettles grow without rain. You scorned me because I did not grow wheat: why, not having wheat, should I trouble myself about yours? You slandered my father, you robbed him, you banished him; you have scorned me, and now you wish me to risk my life in order to be of service to you, and that for you I should implore the mercy of God. But I am deceiving myself: you have no

doubt come here as a fresh insult, and in order that this insult should lack nothing, it is a saint, it is the respectable Mir Hadji Fethali who has been chosen to make me such a proposal. A camel is not loaded when it is on its feet but when on its knees, and you see I am on my feet !'

Iskander rose, proud as a king, terrible as a god.

'Now,' said he, 'Mir Hadji Fethali and I have some little transactions to settle. If you will excuse us, gentlemen, we will retire for a few minutes.'

He signed to Mir Hadji Fethali to follow him into the adjoining room.

At this sign, the face of Hadji Fethali grew long and dark like night in autumn. He rose with a smile, but, as everyone knows, there are two smiles ; one invites a kiss, the other prepares to bite.

They both passed into an adjoining room.

What they said there, Hussein with the black beard, Fersali with the pink beard, and we ourselves cannot tell, unless we listened at the door of the room into which Hadji Fethali and Iskander had retired.

After a brief space, the two enemies re-entered with smiling faces. They resembled the two diamond orders of the Lion and the Sun, placed side by side on the breast of a Persian Minister.

Turning to his two other visitors, Iskander said :

‘ I had at first motives known only to myself for not yielding to the wishes of the inhabitants of Derbend, but the respectable Hadji Fethali, whom God preserve, has shown me such good reasons for my decision that I am now prepared to fetch the snow from the summit of Shah-Dagh at the risk of rolling over the precipice or coming into contact with the Mollah Nour. All is in the power of Allah, and if a warm and fervent prayer can soften the heart of God, it will soften it, and the clouds will weep so copiously that the earth shall be refreshed not only for this year, but for the next also. I leave to-night. Pray for me : I will act.’

Then he added :

‘ Time is precious ; I will not detain you.’

The deputation thanked Iskander, their feet were again thrust in their slippers, and the visitors departed.

Iskander was left alone with his thoughts, which was what he desired.

‘ Well,’ he cried joyfully, so soon as he was sure no one could overhear him, ‘ it is even better than I believed. That old rascal of a Hadji Fethali wished me the worst evil, because my father, before everybody, once called him “son of a ——,” never mind

what. Like a true patriarch, behold, he has sacrificed his own resentment to the public welfare by giving me his niece for a little snow. Honest man, ha !'

On their part, as they went away, Hussein and Fersali said :

'This Iskander is not a man, he is an angel. He is furious with Derbend, enraged against Fethali, but when he heard of the tears and sufferings of the poor he could refuse us nothing.'

The populace, delighted at the consent of Iskander, began to sing and dance.

Fethali laughed in his beard.

'A promise, a promise,' he muttered—'what is a promise, especially when there are no witnesses? He cannot compel me. I should have died of shame if I had had to return to the people with Iskander's refusal. Besides, I added, "If you happily accomplish your journey." Iskander is not back yet; the heights of Shah-Dagh are steep, and the Mollah Nour is very brave. We shall see, we shall see.'

A very saintly man and one directly descended from the prophet was the Mir Hadji Fethali, son of Ismael !

Iskander, out of sheer joy, kissed his fine Karabachian horse, saying :

‘They are fools, upon my word, to think I am doing all this for their corn. Ah, for Kanina, for Kanina, for my beautiful, my adored Kanina, I would climb not only Shah-Dagh but the moon.

‘Ibrahim, some corn for my horse, some corn.’

CHAPTER VI.

ODE IN HONOUR OF THE NOSE.

‘ That fate may be accomplished.’

Inscription engraved on a sword.

HAVE you ever reflected, dear readers, on that admirable thing, a nose ?

A nose ? Yes, a nose.

How useful a nose is to every individual who, as Ovid says, lifts his face to heaven.

Yet, strange fact, unheard-of ingratitude, not a single poet has had the idea of writing an ode to the nose.

It must be I, who am not a poet or who, at least, possess only the pretension of coming after the great poets ; to me comes an idea like this.

Truly the nose is unfortunate.

Men have invented so much about the eyes.

To them have been made songs, compliments, kaleidoscopes, pictures, decorations, spectacular displays.

And for the ears ?

Earrings first ; then Roberto el Diavolo, Wilhelm Tell, Fra Diavolo, Stradivari violins, Erard pianos, saxophones.

And for the mouth ?

Carême, la Cuisinière Bourgeoise, the almanack of gastronomy, the dictionary of gourmands, all sorts of soups from Batignigny Russe to Soupe au chou française. It has been made to eat the reputation of great men from cutlets à la Soubise to Boudens à la Richelieu. Its lips have been compared to coral, its teeth to pearls, its breath to sweet herbs. Peacocks, with all their feathers, have been preserved for it, woodcocks without being drawn. In fact, larks roasted whole are promised in the future.

What has been invented for the nose ?

Essence of roses and snuff.

Well, that is not very philanthropical, gentlemen, poets, comrades.

And yet with what fidelity this member—the nose is not a member, cry the scientific men. Pardon, gentlemen, I retract ; the appendix ? Ah ! And yet, as I was saying, with what fidelity this member serves you.

The eyes sleep, the mouth shuts, the ears grow deaf.

The nose always keeps guard.

It guards your repose, contributes to your health ; all the other parts of your body, hands, feet, do silly things. Hands get found in pockets like the foolish things that they are ; the feet stumble and let the body fall, like the awkward things that they are.

And in this latter instance—from which most authors still suffer—the feet are to blame, but the nose is punished.

How often have you not heard it said : ‘ So-and-so has broken his nose ! ’

There have been many broken noses since the beginning of the world.

Can you tell me of a single case in which it has been the fault of the nose itself ?

No, but it all falls on the poor nose.

Well, the nose supports it all with evangelical patience. True, sometimes it has the audacity to snore ; but when or where have you heard it complain ?

Let us forget that Nature has created it an admirable instrument, especially like a trumpet when coughing, for augmenting or diminishing the volume of the human voice at pleasure. Let us say nothing of the service it renders us as intermediary between

our souls and the souls of flowers. Let us ignore its utility, and let us consider it only from the æsthetic point of view—its beauty.

As the cedar of Lebanon, it tramples under foot the hyssop of the moustache. As central column, it acts as a base to the double arch of the eyebrows. On its crest rests the eagle, that is to say, thought. Around it smiles play. With what pride did the nose of Ajax confront the storm when he said: 'I shall escape despite the gods!'

With what courage did the nose of the great Condé—who would never have been called great except on account of his nose—with what courage, I repeat, did the nose of the great Condé enter the Spanish entrenchments before anyone else, before even the Great Condé himself, when the conqueror of Lens and Rocroi had had the audacity to throw in his marshal's bâton!

With what assurance did the nose of Dagazon present itself to the public when he had discovered forty-two methods of moving, and each more comic than the last!

No, I do not think that the nose should be condemned to the obscurity in which man's ingratitude has left it until now.

Perhaps it is because the noses of the West are

generally so small that they have suffered this injustice.

But, confound it, there are other noses besides those of the West.

There are noses in the East which really are fine noses.

Do you doubt the superiority of those noses over your own, gentlemen, whether you come from Vienna, Paris, or Petersburg?

If Viennese embark on the Danube, if Parisian take the steamer, if from Petersburg the Peridadnoï, and say this one word 'To Georgia.'

But I warn you beforehand that a profound humiliation will await you in Georgia. Even with one of the biggest noses in Europe, that of Alcides XI. or Schiller, you will be regarded with astonishment at the entrance to Tiflis, where they will say: 'Why, there is a man who has lost his nose on the journey. What a misfortune!'

From the first street in the town—did I say from the first street in the town?—why from the first houses in the outskirts, you will be convinced that all noses, Greek, Roman, German, French, Spanish, and even Neapolitan, should bury themselves with shame in the very bowels of the earth at the sight of a Georgian nose.

Ah, good Lord, the beautiful noses in Georgia—the robust, the magnificent noses.

To begin with, they are of every shape.

Round, big, long, wide.

They are of every hue.

White, pink, red, and violet.

Some are mounted with rubies, some with pearls, and I have seen one mounted with turquoises.

You have only to press them between two fingers—aye, the smallest fingers—and a supply of the wine of Kaketia will flow.

In Georgia, a law of Wachtang IV. has abolished the fathom—the larchine yard. Only the nose has been kept.

Materials are measured by the nose.

You say: 'I have bought seventeen noses of llama wool to make myself a dressing-gown, seven noses of flannel to make me a pair of trousers, a nose and a half of satin to make me a tie.'

And permit me to add that the ladies of Georgia find this measure is worth much more than all the metrical systems of Europe.

But with reference to noses, those of Daghestan are not to be despised.

For instance, in the middle of the face of that Bey of Derbend, Hadji Joussouf—God give more power

to his elbow—rises a protuberance for which his fellow-townsmen are still seeking an appropriate designation : yet some call it a trunk, others a rudder, and others again a handle.

Beneath its shade three men could sleep !

It can now be understood how such a nose was respected at Derbend, when the heat was fifty-two degrees in the sun, while beside that nose—that is to say, in the shade—it was only forty degrees !

You will therefore not be surprised that they deputed Joussouf to be guide to Iskander.

But to tell the whole truth, it was not entirely on account of his nose that he was appointed.

As indicated by the title of Hadji, which we have prefixed to the name of Joussouf, Joussouf had been to Mecca.

To get there he had traversed Persia, Asia Minor, Palestine, the Desert, a part of Arabia Petra, and a portion of the Red Sea.

Upon his return what admirable accounts Joussouf had given of his travels, of the dangers he had encountered, the brigands he had felled to the ground, the ferocious animals whose jaws he had broken, like Samson !

When he appeared in the bazaar, the people made

way for him saying, 'Clear a space for the Lion of the Steppes.'

'A fine fellow,' said those with the most pointed moustaches and the longest beards, when Joussouf cut off heads with the end of his tongue. It was even declared that when crossing a Persian mountain, on arriving at the summit he hung up his papak on the horn of the moon, so high was the mountain. For a long while he had no food but omelettes of eagle's eggs, and by night he slept in caves where, when he sneezed, the echo of itself replied, 'God bless you.' It is true that most of the time he talked without reflecting, but when he had spoken his words gave other people food for reflection. What animals had he not seen, what men had he not met? He had seen animals with two heads and only one foot; he had met men who had no heads and thought in their stomachs.

All these stories had grown a little stale, which was no doubt the reason why they had not thought of sending him to fetch the snow. But, when by general consent the mission had been entrusted to Iskander, Joussouf mounted his Persian horse, fastened into his belt his dagger from Andren, his pistol from Kouba, and his schaska from Wladishawtha, and proudly rode through the streets of Derbend saying :

‘ If you like I will accompany poor Iskander ; for what do you suppose poor Iskander could do without me ? ’

To which they replied :

‘ So be it ; accompany Iskander. ’

Then he returned to his house to replenish his defensive armour with a mailed cuirass of copper, his offensive armour with a gun from Nouka ; yellow boots with high heels completed his costume, and he finally hung on to his saddle his cap and his whip.

He could scarcely move with all this arsenal.

Ready long before Iskander, he waited at the gate, saying :

‘ Well, is this giant-killer never coming ? If I had been selected, I should have started two hours ago. ’

About six in the evening, Iskander emerged from his courtyard, mounted on his Karabachian horse, in his usual attire and with his customary weapons.

Iskander rode slowly through the town, not in the least because he desired to be gazed at, but because the streets which led from his house to the gates of Derbend were crowded with people.

At length he joined Joussouf, shook hands with him, waved for the last time to the inhabitants of Derbend, and set off at a gallop.

Joussouf followed him on his horse from Khorasan: for some time men and horses could be discerned, then nothing but dust, then nothing at all.

Men and horses had disappeared.

Iskander reined in his horse on arriving at a large cemetery.

Night began to fall.

But Iskander was not thinking of the night or the cemetery, he was only dreaming of his beloved Kanina.

Joussouf, who looked first to the left and then to the right with some anxiety, took advantage of Iskander's slower pace to overtake him.

Iskander was absorbed in thought.

If you have been young, if you have ever loved with all your soul, and if—young and loving—you have ever quitted the place inhabited by your beloved, you will understand the emotions that were agitating the breast of Iskander Bey. Doubtless it is folly to imagine that by breathing the same air we have the same dreams; that by looking a dozen times at a window, even if it be closed, we carry away a tender recollection; but this folly affords comfort, as imagination is always more picturesque than reality. Imagination is poetry; it flies lightly

like angels and birds, whilst its white wings are never soiled by the mud or dust of the roads.

Reality, on the other hand, is prose ; it is buried in details, it sleeps with one eye open like the sea, and when resting on the white neck of the betrothed it does not look at the fineness of the skin, but if the pearls of the necklace are real or false. Reality pays court to the husband, caresses the dog, and bestows gifts on the servants.

For my part, let us have poetry !

Iskander was making much the same reflections as ourselves, only he made them twenty-five years earlier in life, which imparted to them the hue of the rose and the perfume of the hawthorn, when he felt Joussouf touch him on the shoulder.

‘Well,’ he asked, waking from his reverie, ‘what is it, Joussouf?’

‘Since we have decided not to stay in the town with the living, I do not see why we should stay in a cemetery with the dead. I will burn their coffins if all these tombstones do not seem to be rising up, and if this diabolical gallows is not stretching its gnarled and fleshless arm towards us.’

‘It is sighing for you, Hadji Joussouf, and fears you will escape it,’ replied Iskander laughing.

‘I will spit on the beard of whoever planted it

there,' said Hadji Joussouf. 'Allah protect me, but, good Mussulman though I think myself, pure of heart as I am, each time I pass here it always seems as though it would seize me by the neck. And to tell the truth you must confess that if we were not under Russian Government we should not stay long in the town, but with gun at our shoulder and foot in the stirrup, it would be down with the caravans. Oh, how I should like to settle those caravans ; how I would hack the men in pieces no bigger than grains of millet !'

'Decidedly, my dear Joussouf, you must have been born on the road to be so valiant at night. During the revolt of Mollah Khali I saw you fight by day, or rather I did not see you. Was it because you were not at Derbend ?'

'Ah, my dear friend Iskander, you are always laughing at me. Were you not present when I cut off the head of that Lesgian, who was so enraged against me that after his head was on the ground he bit my foot so cruelly that I still suffer from it every time the weather is going to change? Seriously, did you not see that ?'

'God did not grant me that privilege.'

'Besides, are these Lesgians men? Is it worth while risking one's head against their bullets? If I

kill a Lesgian it is nothing. But if a Lesgian kills me, Allah will be put to some trouble to replace me. Also, when I had killed that man, I used to think it was easy to fight hand to hand. I went every day to the citadel. I had adopted a cannon ; I made myself its marksman. Yes, I aimed and I said to the gunners, " Fire ! " When I saw the group into which I had fired dancing, by Allah, I enjoyed myself. I have never boasted of it, but I may tell you, who are my friend, that considering the damage I did I was the principal cause of the Mollah Khali raising the siege. When you think that I never received the smallest cross, not even that of St. George—well—did you not hear something ? ' added the valiant Bey, coming close to Iskander.

‘ What the devil do you expect to hear beyond the whistling of the winds and the cries of the jackals ? ’

‘ Cursed animals, I will kill them—fathers, mothers, and offspring. What rite are they now celebrating, I ask you ? ’

‘ Perhaps they guess that to-morrow night they will be feeding on our corpses. Do you know that the one who gets your nose, my dear Joussouf, will not do badly. ’

‘ Now, now, no joking, Iskander. Foolish words

will bring us ill-luck. This is just the hour for brigands: the demons spread themselves over all the roads when night falls. Iskander, suppose we were to meet the Mollah Nour.'

'Who is this Mollah Nour?' asked Iskander, as if he did not know of whom his companion spoke.

'Not so loud, Iskander, not so loud, I implore you by Hussein and Ali, or I declare I will not stay with you. This cursed Mollah Nour has ears in all the trees; when you are not thinking of him, Pan! He falls on you like lightning.'

'And then?'

'How? And then?'

'I ask you. What afterwards?'

'After you are taken? He likes to laugh and to joke. But you understand his jokes are those of a brigand. If he knows you are a miser, he will first take all you have in your pocket, beside putting you to ransom. From another who is poor, he will take nothing: he will even give.'

'What! he will give?'

'Yes, there have been instances of that. Some brave fellows in love, who lacked the twenty-five roubles to buy a wife—well, he gave them the sum. From another he will take money, presenting him with what he has in the way of bullets and cartridges.

From another, he will ask as many roubles as he can place on the blade of his sword. "Why not!" said he, "I am myself a poor merchant and all trade is risky, especially mine." Sometimes he takes two per cent. of the merchandise, like a Custom-house officer. Once captured all have to pay.'

'But,' asked Iskander laughing, 'are all the people he captures armed only with pipes and not guns, or is this Mollah Nour made of iron?'

'Of iron? Say rather of steel, my dear friend. Bullets flatten on him as on granite. Great is Allah!'

'From what you tell me, Joussouf, I am more inclined to believe that the Mollah Nour is the devil himself. Only the devil, and no man, could stop a whole caravan.'

'Ah, poor lad, how easy it is to see you have never heard anything but the crowing of your own cock! But whoever said that the Mollah Nour had no companions? On the contrary, he is surrounded by a pack of fellows, who think it pays better to eat bread cultivated by others than to take the trouble to cultivate it themselves. Companions! by Allah he does not lack companions. Why I myself, for instance, have often thought of joining him. If I had no parents and no future inheritance, brave and adventurous as I am—but what are you doing, Iskander Bey, and

why are you going at such a pace? It is said that darkness is the devil's bridge and I begin to believe it, since to-night is as black as hell. But do answer, Iskander: what are you thinking about?'

'I think you are a bad rider, Hadji Joussouf.'

'I a bad rider! Are you not ashamed to say so to me? How vexatious that you did not see me settle a band of brigands near Damascus! Without boasting, I may say, that after I had saved them, the whole caravan of pilgrims was at my feet and there was a nice scene. I had killed so many that my gun was quite red and went off of itself. As for my sword, that was quite another matter, it had teeth like a saw. I left seven slain on the field of battle and took two prisoners alive.'

'What did you do with them?'

'I burnt them next day. They were in my way.'

'That was ferocious, Joussouf.'

'That is my way.'

'And you do not blush to tell me such stories. Your gun had more conscience than you, for it at least grew crimson.'

'You do not believe me. Ask Sophar Kouli, he was there.'

'How unlucky that Sophar Kouli died a week ago!'

‘True, for the fool could not wait. But according to you I must be a coward! By Allah, put me in front of a dozen brigands, and you will see how I will do for them. Come. Where are they? Point them out with your finger. Only not at night, for I do not like fighting at night; I want the sun to witness my valour—besides, it is my habit always to aim with the right eye.’

‘I slacken rein in my astonishment, Joussouf. You would kill twelve brigands?’

‘Before breakfast.’

‘May day soon break, and may we encounter a dozen brigands—exactly a dozen! I promise to leave them all to you, Joussouf. I won’t touch one, even with the point of my dagger.’

‘My friend, never wish to see the devil, or he will immediately appear. As the brigands are devils and we are on their ground, it is better not to invoke them, especially as it gets darker and darker into the bargain. Satan must have carried off the moon. Cursed night, we can hardly see the ground beneath our feet. Aie, help, help!’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘A brigand stops me, Iskander. Let me go, demon!’

‘Get out of the way, and I will fire.’

‘Get out of the way, get out of the way—it is easily said. I think he has claws, for he holds me as a falcon grips a pheasant. Who are you? What do you want with me? Look here, my friend, we might come to an understanding.’

Iskander approached Joussof.

‘I thought as much,’ said he. ‘Terror has big eyes. Your brigand is a bush of dergy derevo.¹ My dear Joussof, you would have done better fetching water on an ass from the fountain, than coming with me to fetch the snow from Shah-Dagh.’

‘A bush? I swear it was either a Lesgian or a Tchetchine. But he saw me lay my hand on my dagger, and let go of me.’

‘He saw you lay your hand on your dagger! What, in such darkness that you yourself said the devil had gone off with the moon?’

‘It is well known that these scoundrels have eyes like a cat, and see best in obscurity. Oh, my dear Iskander, what do I see in front of me?’

‘That is the river. How is it with a nose like yours you do not smell the water? Why, my horse knows it better than you.’

¹ A thorny shrub of the Caucasus. The most stubborn of all thorny arbutus. The name means ‘the tree which holds.’ I have left three shirts in it. The Lesgian cloth alone can resist it,

‘Are you going to cross the river to-night?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Iskander, what you wish to do is imprudent. You had much better wait until to-morrow. It is no trifle to cross a river at this hour, especially the Karatcha.’

Iskander was already in the middle of the stream.

Joussouf preferred to follow his companion rather than remain behind.

He plunged into the black river,¹ and after having complained of the chilliness of the water, after exclaiming that he was being pulled by the feet, after having invoked Allah, declaring that he was a lost man, Joussouf ended by emerging on the other bank.

The two companions resumed their ride and successively crossed the Alcha and the Velveta.²

At dawn they were on the bank of the river Samour.

The Samour was wide. They saw huge stones rolling in its waves, and uprooted trees following its course, floating on the surface like bits of straw on a stream.

¹ Karatcha means the black river.

² The white river and the brown river.

This time Iskander yielded to the advice of Joussouf, and paused.

The riders dismounted to rest their horses, and lay down on their bourkas.

But Joussouf was not the man to go to sleep without relating some of his prowess.

Iskander this time listened without interrupting or scoffing : he felt sleep coming.

The one was telling what never happened.

The other was dreaming of what would happen.

At last, seeing that he was alone carrying on the conversation, Joussouf decided to go to sleep.

Iskander had been slumbering for some time.

CHAPTER VII.

MOLLAH NOUR.

A cat becomes a tiger at the sight of a mouse,
But before a lion the cat is no more than a mouse.

IT is pleasant to be awakened by the first ray of the sun, when that first ray comes through silken curtains, and lifts the black covering of night from the face of a woman who is slumbering, fresh as a drop of dew on a leaf. But it is yet more pleasant, after a short sleep, to open the eyes under a serene sky and suddenly to be brought face to face with the smiling face of Nature. The betrothed is always more beautiful than the wife, and what is serene Nature if not the eternal betrothed of mankind?

Iskander slowly opened his eyes, still heavy with dreams, and admired the splendid picture of the morning. All round him was the undulating forest, rich in its southern verdure; over his head

glittered and smoked the snowy peak of Shah-Dagh ; at his feet flowed the noisy Samour, alternately tossing up spray or spreading out its waves in long rings like those of a serpent caught in the rocks.

The nightingales sang on the border of the bed in which the river murmured.

The great enigma of the soul seemed to explain itself by the union of all these sounds.

Iskander remained a moment in ecstasy, but just as the nightingale was recommencing its song an appalling snore from Joussouf recalled him to reality.

The nose of the sleeper protruded from his bourka, the surface of which it exceeded by two or three inches.

Iskander pulled Joussouf by the nose and so woke him.

‘Hullo ! Who goes there ?’ cried Joussouf as he quickly opened his eyes. ‘Oh, it’s you, devil take you,’ he said, recognising Iskander. ‘Did anyone ever see a man’s nose pulled as a Russian official pulls the bell which will summon his doorkeeper ? Learn, Iskander, that when Allah has favoured a man by giving him such a nose, it is in order to command respect and admiration for the owner. I

admire and respect my nose. Share my sentiments in this matter or we shall fall out.'

'Excuse me, my dear Joussouf, but when I am in a hurry I pull a person by the first thing I find close at hand. The first thing, I may say, the only thing belonging to you I could see, the rest being hidden under your bourka, was your nose. I pulled you by it.'

'Iskander, my friend, one day we shall fall out, and I warn you that day will be a bad one for you. What the devil vexed you?'

'I was vexed with that cursed nightingale which, by singing, prevented me hearing you snore. Now, my dear Joussouf, you snore so harmoniously that, compared with the melody you naturally play during your sleep, the Georgian *zourna* is only a tin trumpet.'

'Yes, flatter me now, but all your life may you have nothing to feast on except the smell of roses, and have all their thorns in your boots, if ever——'

Iskander interrupted him.

'Do you not hear anything?'

Joussouf listened with alarm.

'No, nothing,' he said, after a minute, 'except the voice of the Mollah of Serfourî.'

'Well, what does the voice say? "Wake, faithful

Mussulmen, prayer is better than sleep." We have a long distance to cover, Joussouf ; let us pray and set forward.'

Joussouf grumblingly yielded to the invitation. It had seemed to him that in the discussion Iskander had yielded to him, and this occurred so rarely that he would like to have profited by the humour his comrade was in.

After having made their ablutions and said their prayers, our travellers prepared to cross the river.

The water was not very high. But those who know mountain rivers, especially those who know the Samour, recognise that the fording of a river is always more dangerous than a battle.

Everything in this case depends on your horse. If he makes a false step you are lost.

But habit makes travellers careless at these fords, in spite of the fact that every year more than one remains there for ever.

The two Beys, thanks to their ability, to their familiarity with this form of exercise, and, above all, to their horses, arrived safe and sound on the other bank of the Samour.

Joussouf, who throughout the transit had remained silent as a tench, began to growl again as soon as they were on the other side.

‘May the devil take this cursed river! I will throw a pig into it,’ said he. ‘And to think that in autumn and winter it dries up so that a frog crossing it would not wet its foot!’

‘Where shall we put up at Serfourî?’ asked Iskander, without listening to the complaints of his companion, who, the danger once past, had already forgotten it. ‘I do not know a soul living there, and we must feed both our horses and ourselves.’

‘I will burn the beards of all the scoundrels there with a wisp of straw,’ replied Joussoûf; ‘it is clear, without an open order¹ from the Governor, not one of them would offer us a drop of water or a radish if he were to see us fall from thirst or hunger.’

‘The inhabitants of Serfourî are no better and no worse than those of Derbend; but after all there are still the Tartars.’

‘Ah! We shall see! Perhaps with a little money we shall get something. Look as you pass into the courts on your side, and I will look on mine. Perhaps we shall find a grey beard. Grey beards are better than red ones. A grey beard usually belongs to a starostat, whilst the red beard is that of a rich man. A red beard nearly always

¹ In Russian, *otkritoy* : liste ; word for word ; open sheet.

has money and a pretty wife, two reasons for shutting the door in the face of a pair of fine fellows like us. And luckily—there is what I was looking for.’

‘Ah ! my friend,’ continued Joussouf, addressing a grey beard ; ‘may we rest an hour at your house and put a morsel of something between our teeth ?’

‘Are you on duty or not ?’ asked the man, a tall and swarthy Tartar.

‘No, my friend, no.’

‘Have you an open sheet from the Governor ?’

‘We have money ; nothing more.’

‘It suffices for a welcome to my house. I often receive the nobles of Khorasan, and, thanks be to Allah ! neither riders nor horses have to complain of Agraim.’

The doors were opened, the travellers entered the courtyard, dismounted, unsaddled their horses and gave them corn.

Let us say, in passing, that the inhabitants of Daghestan are remarkable for their cleanliness, and generally have two-storied houses made of brick, white like lime.

It was one of these houses that Agraim owned, and he invited his guests to ascend to the first floor.

Joussouf required no pressing and showed the way to Iskander.

At the door of the first room Agram took their weapons and leant them against the wall, as a sign that being in his house it behoved him to look after their safety.

This custom is so widespread that the two travellers made no opposition to submitting to it.

On entering the room they saw nothing but women's trousers.

Nothing irritates an Asiatic and a Mussulman, generally, no matter who he may be, so much as a question about his wife.

Hadji Joussouf was dying to ask his host about the trousers, but Agram was the possessor of a face which arrests jests on the lips of a sorry jester.

'Will you not offer us a pinch of pillaff?' he asked the Tartar.

'The Prophet himself never ate the equal of what my wife made,' replied Agram. 'Allah! it was so rich that all my guests wiped their fingers by licking them.'

'What the devil is he talking about?' asked Iskander Bey of his companion.

'I do not know. But it seems to me, talking as

he does of the past, that the rogue only means to feed us with the companions of his wife.'

'Why not?' said Iskander, 'they are fat enough for that.'

Then, to the Tartar:

'Tell me, my friend, is there no means of procuring a plate of soup and a piece of schislek. Here is bread and cheese it is true, but the bread is mouldy and the cheese very dry.'

'Soup! Where would I get soup?' replied Agraim. 'Schislek! where would I get schislek? Khari Mollah has eaten my sheep from the first to the last. It was my wife, my young and beautiful Oumi, who used to make the schislek in the best way.'

And the Tartar licked his lips with his tongue.

'Where is she—the young and beautiful Oumi?' asked Joussouf.

'She is dead and buried,' replied the Tartar; 'with her I buried my last fifty roubles. I have nothing of hers but her trousers—and I weep over them.'

And the Tartar actually took the trousers and kissed them, weeping over them.

'A good souvenir,' said Joussouf. 'She must have been a charming woman, this young and beautiful Oumi. Give us each a cup of milk and we will weep for her with you.'

‘Milk! Oh, you should have seen my dear Oumi drawing it from our cows, between her fingers whiter than the milk. But no Oumi, no cow; and no cow, so no milk; therefore now——’

‘Now, my friend, you begin to bore us with the young and beautiful Oumi. Fifty kopecks if you bring each of us a cup of milk; if not, be off for a walk.’

And he pushed him out of the room.

‘I would sell your mother for two onions, you old villain,’ continued Joussof, returning to take a seat near Iskander and trying to dig his teeth into the cheese. ‘All the cocks of the village are crowing in my stomach, and the rogue wanted to feed us on the trousers of the young and beautiful Oumi. There, look at him now, meddling with our guns and talking to the passers-by. What have you to chatter about to that wicked Lesgian, like a dancing-girl of Schumakh, you wretched scoundrel, instead of bringing us some food? Allah preserve me, I am so hungry I could eat the fish that caused the deluge by passing from the Ganges to the sea. Look here, bring us something quick.’

‘In a minute, in a minute,’ answered the Tartar.

Actually, in a few moments, he returned, carrying a cup of milk in each hand.

Our travellers dipped their bread in the milk, whilst their host resumed his tears where he had left them, again looking at his wife's trousers.

After he had finished his frugal repast, Joussouf threw sixty kopecks on the trousers of the young and beautiful Oumi, and mounting their horses and taking the road to the mountain, they soon left behind them the dust of Serfour.

'Look behind us,' said Joussouf, always on the watch, to Iskander; 'the same Lesgian to whom the tender-hearted Agraim was talking is following us with his eyes and watching where we are going.'

Behind the two travellers, on a little elevation, could be recognised the interlocutor of their Tartar host.

But, so soon as he saw in his turn that he was the object of the attention of the two travellers he disappeared.

'Well, what next?' asked Iskander.

'I mistrust those Lesgian scoundrels. What do you think?'

'According to you, and if you were to be believed, every shepherd is a brigand.'

'Even granting that the shepherds in this country are honest, the mountaineers murder travellers and pillage the caravans, and the shepherds by feeding

the mountaineers reap the booty. The whole company—that is, the whole band of Mollah Nour—what are they but mountaineers? And who feeds Mollah Nour and his band? Why, the shepherds.’

‘Well, after all, are not your Mollah Nour and his mountaineers made of flesh and bones like us? Devil take me, if you do not make me anxious to encounter your bandit, if only from curiosity to see if his skin is so bullet-proof as they say.’

‘There you are once more. Now that’s the old story over again. You are neither a dog nor a heathen to utter such wishes. Does it seem such a burden to you to carry your soul in your body and your head on your shoulders? May the devil tear my nose out if I would not rather meet a lion than this Mollah Nour. Now, why are you stopping?’

‘If you were not so frightened, you would not have lost your way. Look where you have brought us. The devil himself could not get through here without a lantern.’

And indeed they found themselves on a steep mountain forming the first ridge of Shah-Dagh, so to say. The road became so dangerous that the two travellers were obliged to dismount and to hang on to the tails of their horses.

They at length arrived on a plateau, and, according

to his habit, Joussouf, who had remained silent during the peril, began to swear and to curse now the danger was over.

‘May the tail of the devil flog this mountain!’ said he. ‘May all the boars of Daghestan make their holes there! May an earthquake upset it, and may the thunder reduce it to dust—accursed place!’

‘You are in fault and you blame the mountain,’ said Iskander, shrugging his shoulders. ‘What did you tell me? “I know the way as well as I know my mother’s lullaby. I will guide you through the pass of Shah-Dagh as easily as through the windings of the bazaar. I have played pitch and toss on all its rocks, and hide and seek in the caves.” Did you, or did you not, tell me that?’

‘Certainly I told you so. Did I not ascend the highest peak three years ago; but it was three years ago, and it was not so steep as it is now.’

In fact, from the place where the travellers had now arrived, the Shah-Dagh looked to them like a wall surmounted with white battlements. These white battlements were the snow.

The travellers saw the impossibility of scaling the mountain on that side.

They decided to attempt the enterprise from the eastern side, only it was easier to decide than to

accomplish. It was all wild and desolate. On its sharp and high peaks, the eagles with their cries alone disturbed the sombre stillness, which seemed that of death itself.

Iskander Bey turned to Joussouf and looked at him with an expression which seemed to say :

‘Well?’

‘May a thousand million curses fall on the top of this miserable Shah-Dagh! See how the ill-mannered curmudgeon treats visitors, putting his bachelik over his ears, shutting himself within his walls, pulling up his steps with him! Where are we going to now? On the mountain or under the mountain? My faith, ask advice from whom you will, Iskander; as for me, I shall ask it from my bottle.’

And Joussouf produced a gourd full of brandy from his pocket.

‘What a confirmed sinner you are!’ said Iskander to his companion. ‘Have you not enough follies of your own, without adding those of wine?’

‘First of all, it is not wine but brandy which I have in my gourd.’

‘Wine or brandy, it is all the same.’

‘Not at all; note the difference. Mahomet forbade wine, but not brandy.’

‘I quite believe it, for it was not invented in the

time of Mahomet. He could not forbid what did not exist.'

'There you are mistaken, Iskander. In his capacity as prophet, Mahomet knew very well that brandy would be invented later on. Or if he did not know it, why then he was a false prophet.'

'No blasphemy, Joussouf,' said Iskander frowning; 'let us rather seek our way.'

'Our way is here,' said Joussouf, tapping the gourd.

He lifted the gourd to his lips and swallowed five or six mouthfuls of the liquor, the orthodoxy of which was in dispute, closing his eyes with an expression of beatification.

'Joussouf, Joussouf,' said Iskander, 'I will predict for you that with such a guide you will arrive quicker at hell than at heaven.'

'Well, what can I say, Iskander?' retorted Joussouf. 'Before I gave this friendly embrace to my gourd, I could not see a single path. Now—brrrou—I see a dozen.'

'That may be, Hadji Joussouf, but I am not the man to follow your paths,' said Iskander. 'Take the right, take the left, take which you will, I am going to try to climb straight up the mountain. If one of us finds a good road, let him return here and call his

companion. He will be awaited. I will take half an hour and will give you the same for our search. Good-bye.'

Hadji Joussouf, heated by the five or six mouthfuls of brandy he had drunk, did not even deign to answer Iskander. He valiantly departed to find his path.

Iskander, for his part, leading his horse by the bridle, began to ascend straight ahead, as he had said.

The day was drawing to a close.

Just above the place where the two travellers separated, on the line where the snow touched the clouds, rose a vast rock, on the flattened summit of which men and horses could find a refuge.

Sixteen Tartars and a Lesgian lay around a fire. As many horses as there were men ate the grass that had been mown with swords.

At a short distance from them, reposing on a carpet, was a man of about forty years of age, remarkable for the beauty of his face and the calmness of his physiognomy.

He was very simply attired, but with signs of wealth, though only according to the necessities of a martial life, for gold and silver glittered on the mounting of his gun and scabbard and on the handle of his kanjiar.

He was smoking a chibouque and looking affectionately at a young lad, who lay sleeping at his knees. Sometimes he sighed, shaking his head, and sometimes sighed more painfully, throwing a searching glance around.

He was Mollah Nour, the scourge of Daghestan ; the brigand Mollah Nour with his bandits.

All of a sudden he saw Joussouf, who, a thousand feet below, was still searching for a path to ascend the Shah-Dagh and groping his way with care among the stones.

For some time the Mollah Nour, raising himself on his elbow, watched the traveller. Then he smiled, and leaning towards the ear of the lad said to him :

‘Awake, Gulchade.’

Gulchade in Tartar means a rose.

The young man opened his eyes, smiling.

‘Gulchade,’ said Mollah Nour to him, ‘do you wish me to bow to the ground before you ?’

‘I should like it very much,’ said the young man ; ‘it would be a novelty for me to see you at my feet.’

‘Gently, gently, Gulchade ; before the honey comes the sting of the bee ; look down below.’

The young man lowered his eyes in the direction Mollah Nour indicated.

‘Do you see the traveller passing by?’

‘Of course I see him.’

‘I know his name and his courage. He is as brave as a leopard and the first shot in Derbend. Go to him, disarm him, tie his hands, and bring him to me. If you do that, I will be your servant for the whole evening, and before all our comrades I will pay you homage. Do you consent?’

‘Very well,’ replied Gulchade.

The young man jumped on a sturdy little mountain pony and guided it along a narrow path, which seemed more like a line drawn with chalk than a road cut in the rock.

The stones could still be heard rolling under the hoofs of his horse, when he was no longer seen.

All the companions of Mollah Nour peered down, curious to watch what was coming.

The chief was more attentive than all the others.

Perhaps he regretted having exposed the young man to the danger, for when Gulchade was within a few paces of Joussouf, his pipe fell from his hands and his face betrayed his anxiety.

Hadji Joussouf had no idea of what was going on, or rather of what was going to happen. Over-excited by the mouthfuls of brandy he had drunk, he tried to reassure himself by talking aloud, and considered

himself more valiant than Sincherhazi or Jean Sbogard.

‘Oh, oh,’ said he, ‘it is not for nothing that my gun bears the inscription, “*Be careful, I breathe a flame.*” I will burn the beard of the first brigand who dares to cross my path; besides, I have nothing to fear, my cuirass is bullet-proof. But where are these bandits? Where are these brigands? The cowards conceal themselves. No doubt they have seen me. By Allah, I detest cowards!’

Suddenly, as he reached a turning on his way, he rolled the last syllables of his sentence very differently round his mouth, for he heard a rough voice cry to him :

‘Halt there; dismount!’

As he looked up aghast, he saw at ten paces the barrel of a gun aimed at his chest.

Poor Joussof turned white as death; his heart seemed to stop beating in his breast.

‘Come, come, dismount and be quick,’ he was bidden for the second time by a voice which seemed to him harsher than the first; ‘and do not try to put your hand either on your gun or your schaska. If you attempt to escape, I fire. Your gun first.’

‘Not only my gun but my soul, Sir Bandit,’ replied the trembling Joussof. ‘I am a harmless

fellow, incapable of hurting anyone. Do not kill me and I will be your servant. I will take care of your horse and brush your clothes.'

'The gun, the gun,' said the voice.

'Here it is,' said Joussouf, placing it with trembling hand on a rock.

'Now the other weapons—the schaska, the kanjiar, and the pistol.'

'There,' said the unhappy Joussouf, throwing every weapon named by the bandit on the ground as he mentioned it.

'Now turn out your pockets.'

Joussouf threw all the money he had beside his weapons, imploring the clemency of the brigand while obeying his orders.

'I will cut out your tongue and throw it to the dogs if you do not keep silent,' said Gulchade; 'stop talking, or I will silence you for ever.'

'Excuse me, Sir Brigand, I will not say another word if that is your wish.'

'Hold your tongue, I tell you!'

'I hear and I obey you.'

But it was only when Gulchade aimed his pistol at him that Joussouf ceased chattering.

Gulchade bound his hands, took his weapons, and made him walk towards the plateau where Mollah

Nour and his companions awaited the end of the comedy.

After a journey of a quarter of an hour, Joussouf was in the presence of the brigand chief.

His companions were grouped round him in a circle ; all kept a menacing silence.

Gulchade laid the arms of Joussouf at the feet of Mollah Nour.

Then Mollah Nour bowed to the ground three times before Gulchade, and the third time kissed him on the brow.

Next, turning to Joussouf:

‘Do you know who disarmed you, Joussouf?’ he asked him.

Joussouf shook all over at the sound of this voice.

‘The bravest of the brave,’ answered Joussouf, ‘the strongest of the strong. What could I do against him, before whom the lion would become a hare, and Goliath a babe of a week old?’

The bandits roared with laughter.

‘Look at this bravest of the brave, this strongest of the strong!’ said Mollah Nour, lifting the white papak from the head of Gulchade.

The long dark hair fell rippling over her shoulders, and the young girl blushed as rosy as the flower the name of which she bore.

Mollah Nour opened his arms and she threw herself on the brigand's breast.

'Joussouf,' said Mollah Nour, 'I have the honour to present my wife to you.'

A burst of laughter rang in the ears of the unfortunate prisoner.

He became purple with shame ; however, having recovered his presence of mind :

'Have pity on me, master,' said he ; 'do not sell me in the mountains. I can pay a large ransom.'

The eyebrows of Mollah Nour met, black as two clouds charged with electricity.

'Do you know to whom you are proposing a ransom, you hare?' he cried to Joussouf. 'You miserable wretch, do you think that I am a butcher in Derbend who sells rotten meat for fresh that I should ask gold for you, who are not worth a grain of lead. You dog without a tail, of what use are you? You cannot even dig the ground with your nose. You will tell me that like any nurse or old governess you can tell tales of giants and ogres to little children, but for that you should dress as a woman, and instead of amusing the poor innocents you would frighten them! Well, Joussouf, you see that I know you and that I am not complimentary.

Now in your turn tell me what you think of me. I am Mollah Nour.'

On hearing this terrible name, Hadji Joussouf fell with his face to the ground, as though struck by lightning.

'Allah!' he cried. 'You wish me to say what I think of you, that I should judge you, I who would be proud to make my ablutions in the dust of your feet.¹ May Hussein and Ali preserve me!'

'Listen, Joussouf,' said Mollah Nour, 'and remember that I have a horror of repeating the same command twice. I have asked you once what you think of me. I ask it you again this second time, but recollect it is the last. I am listening.'

'What I think of you? May the devil break my head like a nut if I think anything of you of which you could complain. How could I think badly of you—I a nonentity, a grain of dust?'

'Joussouf,' said Mollah Nour, tapping the ground with his foot, 'I have told you I never repeat the same order three times.'

'Do not get angry, do not get angry, exalted Mollah Nour. Do not consume me with the fire of your anger. Your wishes have changed the

¹ In default of water, Mussulmen are permitted to make their ablutions with sand or dust.

ideas in my brain to pearls, but these pearls are only as glass in comparison with your qualities. What I think of you, illustrious Mollah Nour, I will tell you as you wish it. I think your mind is a gun ornamented with gold and silver, loaded with wisdom; it is fired by truth and never misses its aim. I think your heart is a flagon of honeyed roses, which sheds on everyone the perfume of your virtues. I think your hand scatters benefits with the profusion of a husbandman sowing wheat. I think your tongue is a branch laden with the flowers of justice and the fruits of kindness. I already hear it say to me, "Return home, my good Joussouf, and all your life remember Mollah Nour." Is that so, O great man?'

'There is no denying you are a grand orator, Joussouf, but you are a bad guesser, and to prove you have lied, here is my decision. Because, being a Bey you have allowed yourself to be disarmed, bound, and made prisoner by a woman——'

'Is not death also a woman?' interrupted Joussouf, 'and more terrible than the most terrible man?'

'Let me finish, Joussouf, it will not take long. Because he who has such fear of death is not worthy to live—you shall die.'

Joussouf uttered a moan.

‘To-morrow shall be the last morning of your life, and if you say a single word, if you utter a single complaint, if a single murmur escapes your lips,’ added Mollah Nour, putting his hand on his dagger, ‘you will not even see to-morrow. Come, bind him yet tighter, lead him to the cave, and leave him alone there. He can then talk as freely and as much as he desires.’

Mollah Nour made a sign, and poor Joussouf was lifted up and carried off like a sack of flour.

‘He will die of fright before he dies,’ said Gulchade to her lover ; ‘do not frighten him so, my well-beloved.’

‘Good,’ said Mollah Nour, laughing, ‘it will be a lesson to him ; the cur will learn that escape is not through fear. The coward dies a hundred times, the brave man only once—and he takes some time over it.’

Then turning to the bandits :

‘My lads,’ he said, ‘I shall leave you for an hour. If anything should happen to me, if by chance I should not come back, Gulchade will lead you ; she has to-day proved she is worthy to command men. Woe to him who will not obey her ! Good-bye, Gulchade,’ he added, pressing the young woman to

his heart and kissing her on the forehead. 'I say good-bye and I embrace you because I am going to an encounter more serious than yours. For a long while I have wished to measure my strength against that of Iskander Bey, and, thanks to my nouker, I know where to find him. If I do not return before night, seek my corpse by my tracks on the mountain, and try to recover it, so that I may not be eaten by jackals like a dead horse. If you hear shouts and shots, let no one move. If Iskander kills me, let no one avenge me. He who will have killed Mollah Nour deserves to be our equal, for he must be a brave man. I am going in pursuit of him. Farewell.'

He threw his gun over his shoulder and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Danger and I are two lions born the same day, and I am the elder.

MEANWHILE Iskander Bey had found a path which wound round the mountain.

To his right was a precipice : on his left rose rocks rent in some places by lightning.

But for this intrepid traveller returning was out of the question. He must always advance. The road was too narrow for a horse to turn, so he pushed onwards.

At last he reached a rock under the arch of which he had to pass.

Beneath this vault the road failed, but a lump of ice detached from the mountain formed a fragile and transparent bridge.

Below the bridge and in the depths of the abyss rushed a torrent.

The youth paused for a moment, his cheek grew pale and his forehead was damp with perspiration, but the thought of Kanina brought back his courage.

His practised eye had recognised the tracks of a horse on the ice. He urged on his own, encouraging him with knee and voice. By crossing quickly, the weight was diminished.

Behind him he heard the breaking ice crash down the precipice.

At last he breathed more freely, at the sight of the other side of the arch. The light grew still more brilliant from the reflection of the snow.

But all at once, in the archway of this vault, a horseman appeared before him and, by an optical effect, the horseman seemed a giant.

‘Halt and throw down your arms, or you are a dead man,’ cried the horseman to Iskander. ‘I am Mollah Nour.’

At first, astonished by this unexpected meeting, Iskander had reined in his horse, but on hearing the name of Mollah Nour one danger made him forget the other.

He urged on his horse and detached his gun from his shoulder.

‘You are Mollah Nour,’ said he; ‘well, out of my road, Mollah Nour. You can see there is not room for two here.’

‘Then let God decide which shall pass,’ said the brigand, presenting his pistol at the chest of

Iskander, who was not ten paces from him. 'You fire first.'

'Fire yourself. I am not aware that I am hiding behind my horse.'

They remained facing one another for several seconds, each holding his weapon raised and waiting for the other to fire.

Then they both lowered the muzzles, the one of his gun, the other of his pistol.

'Come, you are a brave man, Iskander,' said Mollah Nour, 'a brave man must not be deprived of his arms. Give me your horse and go where you please.'

'Take my arms first and then you shall take my horse. But so long as a charge of powder remains for my gun, so long as my soul is in my body, the hand of shame shall never be laid on the bridle of my horse.'

Mollah Nour smiled.

'I do not want your gun or your horse,' he said. 'I simply wish you to do my bidding. It is not for the sake of the wretched booty that Mollah Nour has made himself the brigand chieftain, but because he is accustomed to command. Woe to the man who disobeys his orders! I have often heard of you. Your courage has been praised, and now, Iskander,

with my own eyes I see you are brave. But it is not for nothing that I have crossed your path. We shall not separate until we have crossed swords. This is my final word : salute me and say "Let us be friends," as you give me your hand, and your road is open.'

'This is my answer,' said Iskander, raising his gun and pulling the trigger.

But it missed fire ; no doubt a drop of water falling from the arch had moistened the priming.

Iskander, furious, threw his gun over his shoulder, drew his pistol from his belt, and fired.

The bullet flattened itself against the silver cartridge case which adorned the tcherkene of Mollah Nour.

The latter never moved, but folded his arms and retorted with a mocking laugh, to the rage of Iskander Bey.

'Oh, nothing shall save you, brigand,' cried the other, and he fell upon Mollah Nour with his schaska.

Mollah Nour drew his sword from its sheath as rapidly as lightning flashes from the clouds.

The blade of Iskander whistled above the head of the brigand, and the blow fell like the wrath of God.

Then, with a horrible noise, the bridge of ice broke under the feet of the two combatants.

Iskander's horse had reared on its hind legs at the moment when its master's sword was directed towards the head of Mollah Nour—but failed to reach it.

The brigand was plunged down the precipice.

Iskander Bey, thrown backwards, had clung to a sharp rocky projection. He gripped it with redoubled intensity as he felt his horse slipping under him, and sliding on the steep slope of the shelving bridge of ice.

The animal made a supreme effort to gather all its force into its hind quarters, and, impelled by their steel-like strength, actually leapt the yawning chasm and fell on the other side of the gulf, covered with sweat and trembling with fright.

Luckily Iskander had freed his feet from the stirrups. With the weight of its rider the horse could not have cleared the precipice now behind it. Underneath it the bridge of ice had been dashed down with an appalling crash. The whirlpool howled with joy, like a tiger which has devoured his prey. Then a deathly silence succeeded this roar.

Iskander had remained hanging from the crag.

Beneath him, marked by the rupture of the bed of ice, was an overhanging rock, presenting a surface of two or three feet.

All around it was a vast void.

Iskander felt his arms growing numb, his muscles contracting. He realised that he could not support himself much longer ; if, despite himself, he let go the rock he was lost.

He calculated the distance with the eye and the calmness of the mountaineer, stretched his arms to their extreme length to diminish the distance, and let himself vertically fall on the rock.

He stood upright on this granite pedestal, like the bronze statue of Will.

He was saved for the moment, at any rate ; but to prevent giddiness he was obliged to close his eyes for an instant.

Yet it was not long before he reopened them to look round and find a means of escape.

This excrescence of rock—if it may be so termed—was sloping and crumbled in certain places on the exterior, but yet practicable to the foot of a mountaineer.

By scrambling on hands and knees he managed to accomplish a half circle round the immense column.

He then found himself on the outward slope of the ravine.

To climb up by the road he had just followed was impossible ; he might as well try to scale a wall.

Therefore no further resource remained except to

descend to the foot of the precipice and, having reached it, to follow the torrent until he found a practicable path.

Iskander was tormented by one thought.

To know what had become of Mollah Nour. A brave man this Mollah Nour, brigand though he was. If he were only wounded he ought to be helped. If dead, his body ought to be rescued from the teeth of wild animals.

For any other than Iskander, or a mountaineer born on the edge of a precipice, this descent would have been impossible.

Iskander undertook it.

The road, or rather the path, which he had followed with his horse had been cut, as we have told you, by a deep cleft, over which had been thrown the bridge of ice that had broken under the feet of the horses. He reached the angle of this cleft and descended with the assistance of its irregularities.

It took him over an hour to move a quarter of a verst.

At last he touched the bottom ; and only then did he dare look up above his head.

Mollah Nour, in falling from a height of five hundred feet, had perhaps crashed through different bridges of ice placed one above the other, and had

finally alighted on an immense bed of snow, whence issued the torrent as from a glacier.

This snow, though it lacked the solidarity of rock or ice, could yet support the weight of a man.

Iskander ventured on it at the risk of being engulfed. Only a pale and wan ray of light penetrated into this crevasse. It was both dark and cold.

By the broken bridges overhead he soon recognised that he must have reached the place where Mollah Nour had fallen.

Horse and rider by their fall had dug an immense funnel in the snow. Iskander let himself slide and felt a resistance under his feet.

He had just found the horse ; its head was completely smashed.

He searched for the man and felt an arm. He drew this arm to him, using the body of the horse as a means of support, and ended by pulling the body from the snowy bed in which it was buried.

Mollah Nour was pallid as a corpse, his eyes were closed, he did not breathe.

Nevertheless, no limbs were broken, no serious wounds were visible. By the law of gravitation the fall of the animal had preceded that of the man, and by opening a road for him, the horse had saved the rider.

Iskander succeeded in getting the body on to his shoulders, in emerging from the funnel of snow, and in regaining the bottom of the valley.

He rubbed the face with his coat violently, hit the palms of his hands, and threw icy water into his face.

Mollah Nour remained unconscious.

‘Wait, wait,’ murmured Iskander ; ‘if you are not dead I will wake you.’

He sat down, placed the head of Mollah Nour on one of his knees, loaded his pistol and discharged it close to his ear. The report echoed like a clap of thunder.

Mollah Nour opened his eyes, and made a movement as though to lay his hand on his kanjiar.

‘Ah, I thought so,’ murmured Iskander.

The hand of Mollah Nour could not complete the movement and fell powerless to his side.

His eyes remained open, but vacant ; his mouth endeavoured to articulate sounds, but his tongue refused to obey his will.

At last he heaved a sigh. Memory, returning to his brain, illuminated his eyes with a gleam of intelligence. He fixed his gaze on Iskander, recognised him, understood that he owed his life to him, made an effort, and murmured :

‘Iskander Bey.’

‘Ah,’ said that individual, ‘that is fortunate. Yes, Iskander Bey, who does not wish you should die, because you are a brave man, do you hear? Jackals and foxes are common, but lions are rare.’

A tear moistened the fierce eyelid of the brigand. He pressed the hand of Iskander.

‘After God,’ he said, ‘it is to you I owe my life, so to you as to God I shall be eternally grateful. It is not for my life that I thank you, but for having risked your own in order to save me. Men have insulted, despised, and betrayed me. I owed them misfortune and I paid them with hatred. Nature has given me many bad instincts, but men have attributed more to me than Nature ever endowed me with. But neither foes nor friends can ever accuse Mollah Nour of ingratitude. Listen, Iskander,’ added the bandit, as he raised himself, ‘misfortune pursues everyone ; some day, maybe, it will overtake you. My heart and my hand are at your service, Iskander, and that hand and heart fear nothing in the world. I would sell my head or permit it to be cut off to save you. Besides, by the future you shall judge me. Now let us see what bones I have broken.’

The robber rose, and, after a few efforts, found himself on his feet. He felt his arms, one after the

other, then his thighs, then his legs, and faltered a few steps, staggering it is true, yet he certainly walked some paces.

‘It is my head,’ he said, ‘which is still a little troubled, but no damage is done to my body, upon my word. Well, well, Allah has preserved me. It appears that I am still necessary for his designs on earth.’

‘And now,’ asked Iskander, ‘how are we going to get out of this?’

‘That is what I am wondering,’ said Mollah Nour, ‘but I am compelled to tell you what it costs a man so much to confess—that I do not know.’

‘Still we can’t stop here to die of hunger,’ said Iskander.

‘Before we die of hunger we have my horse to eat, then yours; for in the midst of my fall, though I did not see much, I clearly perceived it closely following me.’

‘No?’ cried Iskander with a truly joyous feeling, ‘has my poor Karabach been saved by any lucky chance? Why, by Allah, I hear his neigh.’

They both turned in the direction from which the neighing came, and saw the horse advancing to them along the bed of the torrent.

‘Upon my word,’ said Mollah Nour, ‘you were

asking how we should get out. Your horse replies : by the way it came down. It will be the devil's own luck if we do not climb up.'

Iskander joyously went to meet his horse, which, on his side, advanced towards his master as rapidly as the difficulty of ground permitted.

When horse and rider were close to one another, the man took the head of the animal in his arms and embraced it as he would have embraced a friend : the horse neighed with pleasure, the owner wept with joy.

'There,' said Mollah Nour, who had watched them, smiling, 'now that gratitude has been demonstrated, if you will ask your horse the way, nothing detains us here, so far as I see.'

Iskander let his Karabachian go before him, as he would have allowed a dog, and doubtless the animal understood the assistance expected from its intelligence, for he took the road by which he had come.

After half a verst, he stopped, sniffed the ground, looked above his head, and without hesitation began to ascend the mountain.

Close inspection revealed a slight and barely perceptible path, worn by the wild goats who came to drink from the stream.

The horse went foremost.

‘Follow my horse, and hold on to his tail. I do not know if you feel giddy, but if your legs fail you——’

But Mollah Nour shook his head.

‘I am at home,’ said he; ‘the mountain is my house. It is for me to do the honours. Go first.’

Iskander followed his horse. After half an hour devoted to an almost impossible ascent, they found themselves on the path which the bandit had followed when he went to encounter Iskander.

This path naturally led to the plateau where Mollah Nour had left Gulchade and his companions.

The sun had just set. Gulchade and the bandit’s comrades, not seeing him return within the time he had fixed, were about to set out in search of him.

Gulchade threw herself on the neck of her lover; his companions surrounded him.

But Mollah Nour put aside Gulchade, repulsed his comrades, and made Iskander enter this circle of joyous faces, which again grew dark as they confronted him.

‘Behold! my eldest brother,’ said he to his companions; ‘from this moment you owe him the

three things you have sworn to me—love, respect, and obedience. Wherever he may meet one of you, he can command him as I do. Whoever renders him no matter how slight a service will find me his debtor, and will have the right to exact the price with usury. He who renders him a great service I will be indebted to until death. But whoever touches a hair of his head shall not escape my vengeance, either in the depths of the sea or of the grave. I swear it; and may the devil pull out my tongue with his claw if I do not keep my oath. Now let us have supper.'

A carpet was spread and a bad meal was served. The anxiety of the bandits at the absence of their chief was the cause of the neglect of the repast.

Gulchade, according to the custom of Tartar women, did not eat with her lover. She stood timidly aloof, with her back leaning against the rock.

Iskander saw her eyes moist with sadness, and begged a place for her on the carpet.

'That is just,' said Mollah Nour; 'to-day Gulchade is a man, not a woman.'

Supper concluded, Iskander, moved by the beauty of the summer night, and touched by the fraternal attentions of Mollah Nour, could not restrain the

secret which was swelling in his breast. He told his love for Kanina to him and Gulchade.

‘Oh!’ he said, ‘if I could fly like a bird into the future, only for a month, how I would bring Kanina to this peak, how I would show her all that I am ashamed and sad to look at alone, so beautiful is all that I see! I should rejoice in her admiration, and when she said, “It is splendid!” I should press her to my heart, saying, “It is beautiful, but you are more beautiful! you are better than all the world! I love you, more than the mountain, more than the valley, more than the forests, more than the torrents, more than all Nature.” You see, Mollah Nour, how the earth, softly illumined by the moon, sleeps amid the myriad smiles of creation. Well, I think it is even sweeter for a man to sleep under the kisses of the woman he loves. You are happy, Mollah Nour; you are free as the wind; the eagle lends you its wings to pass over the highest summits. You have an intrepid companion. I am not surprised, but I envy you.’

Mollah Nour sadly shook his head as he listened to the young man, who spoke thus to him from the threshold of life.

‘Everyone to his destiny,’ he responded; ‘but believe me, Iskander, do not envy me mine, and,

above all, do not follow my example. It is dangerous to live with men, but it is sad to live without them. Their friendship is the opium which intoxicates and lulls to slumber, but, believe me, it is bitter to live with their hatred. It is not my wish, but Fate, which has rejected me from among them, Iskander ; a river of blood separates us, and it is not in my power to cross it. Liberty is a gift from heaven, the most precious of all I know ; but the outlaw has no liberty, he has only independence. Yes, I am master of the mountain ; granted, I am king of the Steppes ; but my empire is peopled only with wild beasts. There was a time when I hated men, when I despised them, but to-day my soul is weary of contempt and hatred. I am feared—folk tremble at my name ; the mother uses it to quiet her crying child. But the terror one inspires is a toy, which, like all others, soon wearies. No doubt there is the joy of humbling men, of railing at all they vaunt, of discovering their baseness by opening their whited sepulchres. That makes one proud for a moment, more criminal and less contemptible than others. This feeling rejoices for an hour and saddens for a month. Man is wicked, but, all said and done, man is man's brother. Look around us, Iskander ; the mountains are high, the

forests are verdant, the land of Daghestan is rich. But the mountain has no cave, the forest has no tree, the plain contains no house where I can lay my head and say to myself: "You can rest in peace here, Mollah Nour; here you will not be struck by the bullet of a foe in your sleep; here you will not be garrotted like a wild beast." Your towns are peopled and often overflow with inhabitants, yet rich and poor each find their place; their own roofs shelter them from rain, protect them from the cold. For me, my bourka is my only home, my roof, my shelter. The town would not give me even a corner of ground in which to bury my bones. Sorrow is like the wife of the Khan: she knows how to walk on velvet carpets, but like the goat she must also know how to leap from rock to rock. Sorrow is my shadow, and you see my shadow accompanies me even here.'

'Have you suffered much, Mollah Nour?' asked Iskander with interest.

'Do not let me recall it, my friend. When you pass the rock in the bowels of which I was engulfed and from which you rescued me, do not ask me if the lightning or the frost caused the cleft in the granite, but pass quickly by; the bridge is fragile and might crumble beneath you. Flowers are sown

in gardens, but corpses are not buried in them. No, I will not darken the morn with the storms of noon-day. What was, has been. Nothing can be changed in the past, not even the will of Allah. Good-night, Iskander, and God grant no one may dream what I have suffered in reality. To-morrow morning I will show you the shortest way to the Shah-Dagh. Good-night.'

He lay down in his bourka ; the others had for some time been sleeping.

Iskander took longer to become acquainted with sleep. For hours he thought over the events of the day and the gloomy words of Mollah Nour.

Once asleep, he was agitated by the most terrible dreams. It seemed to him at times that a bullet was going through his breast, and again as though he were rolling in a bottomless abyss.

Our dreams are the recollection of the road we have traversed, the trouble and agitation of past events.

There is but one sleep without a dream : the deep sleep ; that is to say—Death.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH JOUSSOUF NARRATES WHAT HE HAS NOT SEEN, BUT IS VERY CAREFUL NOT TO RELATE WHAT HE HAS SEEN.

He flew like the wind over the rocks, like the cataracts through the caverns, without resting his head on the pillow, without closing his eyes in sleep.

THE glow of the rising sun on the top of the mountain awoke the Mollah Nour and all his men ; at first all were absorbed in prayer, then began to burnish their arms, to groom their horses, and to prepare the morning meal.

‘ Your travelling companion has passed a bad night,’ said the Mollah, with a laugh, to his guest.

‘ What, Joussouf ? ’ he asked.

‘ Joussouf himself.’

‘ You know, then, where he is ? ’

‘ I have my suspicions.’

I asked you twice to search for him ; you never answered me.'

'Because I know where to find him.'

'And where is he?'

'At fifty paces from here.'

'What do you intend to do with him?'

'Absolutely nothing: I shall give him back to you. You can do what you please with him. Ah, my fine fellows,' continued the Mollah, addressing his men, 'take some food to the other prisoner and tell him that Mollah Nour does not wish to kill him by starvation.'

Then he told Iskander how Gulchade had arrested Joussouf, had compelled him to give up his arms, and had brought him back a prisoner.

When the morning meal was ended, the Mollah Nour took the hand of Iskander and laid it on his heart and his head.

'You are at home here—and here,' said he ; 'I shall always see you with pleasure ; I shall always gratefully love you. Now I have shown you the path by which to ascend Shah-Dagh, and the path by which to descend. Hasten to be of service to your fellow-countrymen. I am going in the opposite direction, on another errand. Farewell. Remember Mollah Nour. If you are in need of a friend, call

him, and the avalanche does not fall faster to the foot of the mountain than he to come to you.'

And as a flock of wild pigeons fly off, so departed the Chief and his band.

Iskander then descended to the cave.

Joussouf was lying down, with bound hands and blindfolded eyes.

The young Bey could not resist the temptation to torment the courage of his companion for his own amusement.

'Rise and prepare to die,' said he in a rough tone, and disguising his voice.

Joussouf trembled in every limb and with a supreme effort managed to get on to his knees.

His pallor was deadly ; his nose seemed to have lost that solid base by the aid of which, at ordinary times, it formed an acute angle with his mouth, an obtuse angle with his chin, and now only fell inertly over his lips. He raised his hands to heaven and implored pardon in a whining voice.

'Angel Azrael,' he cried, 'have mercy on my head ! I am not ripe for death : where and in what have I offended you ?'

'It is not my will, but that of Mollah Nour. He said : "Joussouf has fought like a tiger ; now that Joussouf knows my retreat, there is no safety for me

on the mountain. Besides, the blood of my comrades spilt by him at the assault of Derbend cries for vengeance and ought to obtain it.”’

‘I!’ cried Joussouf; ‘who is the abominable calumniator; who has said that I fought at the assault of Derbend? Shame on the tomb of his fathers and grandfathers to the tenth generation! No, no. I am not the man to fight against my fellow-countrymen, not I. When trumpet or drum called us to the wall, I immediately went down to the bazaar, and when it was my turn to march I took refuge in the mosque. I gave myself honestly and conscientiously up to glorifying the Prophet. It is true one day I fired three shots, but it was clearly proved the foe was five versts away. As for my sword, try to draw it yourself, and if you can force the blade out of the scabbard I will consent to your cutting off my head with it. From the time of my father it has not quitted the scabbard. How, then, could I have fought against Mollah Khali, against a brave man, against a saint, against a prophet? If he had not cut off the heads of those who drank and who smoked, I should have certainly joined him and would to-day have been one of his most devoted Murids.’

‘There is also a religious side to this vengeance of

Mollah Nour upon you. He knows you are a partisan of Ali, and he has sworn to kill all who believe in Ali.'

'Partisan of Ali! I? Why, I would pluck the beard from Ali, and from his Twelve Caliphs. Why, if I had lived in Egypt in the time of the Fatimites, I would not have been satisfied unless I had dethroned them. I am a Sunnite, do you hear, a Sunnite heart and soul. What is Ali? A grain of dust: I blow and it flies away. A grain of sand: I walk on it and I crush it.'

'But apart from all this, what Mollah Nour will never forgive you is your friendship with his mortal enemy, Iskander.'

'My friendship!' cried Joussouf.

'Was it not a proof of friendship that you gave him by going with him to Shah-Dagh?'

'I went out of friendship, no doubt, but chiefly for my own pleasure.'

'Well, he has been even less successful than you, and his head has fallen before yours.'

'His head has fallen!' repeated Joussouf. 'Well, that's not a serious loss. His head was not worth much. But instead of bearing a grudge against me, Mollah Nour ought to be very grateful to me who brought Iskander to him, who gave him to him

bound hand and foot. Iskander my friend ! There's another fine friend ; why, in his lifetime I would have given him up for a piece of gingerbread. Iskander my friend ! One of the greatest profligates in Derbend, who eats ham with the Russian officers ! He my friend ; why, I would burn the beard of his mother.'

'Unhappy man, leave the dead in peace. If fear had not made you lose your head, you would recollect that his mother could not have a beard.'

'Could not have a beard ? Why, I tell you, she shaved ! By Allah, how many of my razors has she not blunted ! The friend of Iskander ! How could I have had the folly to choose for my friend a man whose father was a brigand, whose mother was mad, and whose uncle a cobbler.'

'I am tired of hearing you perjure yourself ; give up lying, you son of a dog. Lower your head, the sword is uplifted.'

Iskander made his schaska whistle round the head of Joussouf, but instead of touching him with the blade, he cut off with the point the bandage which was over his eyes, thus displaying his customary dexterity.

Joussouf looked with terror at his pretended executioner and recognised Iskander.

He ejaculated a cry and remained stupefied.

‘Now, when you have finished staring at me, you boar, you fool, come, repeat that my father was a brigand, my mother was mad, and my uncle made boots.’

Joussouf, instead of excusing himself and appearing confused, burst into a peal of laughter, and threw himself on the neck of Iskander.

‘So I have managed to put you in a rage. Rather clever on my part. It took a long time, but I did it at last. You tried to lay a trap to catch a nightingale, but you only caught a crow. Can’t you see that I recognised your voice from the first ; your voice, the voice of my best friend ? Why, I should know it in the middle of the howls of the jackals, the miaulling of cats, and the barking of dogs.’

‘You recognised me thoroughly ?’

‘Do you doubt it ?’

‘No ; you were making a fool of me.’

‘For a joke, to have a laugh at you, not for anything else. You quite understand.’

‘But how came it that you surrendered to the wife of Mollah Nour ? Why were you disarmed by her ?’

‘Do you not remember having seen at the residence of the commander at Derbend an engraving

which represented a very beautiful woman, upon my word, unlacing the cuirass of a Bey called Mars, beneath which was written in Russian, "Mars disarmed by Venus?" That was how I allowed myself to be disarmed, my dear friend, but by such a handsome creature; I would have given her all, Iskander, from my bourka to my heart. I should dearly have liked to see you, you rascal, what you would have done meeting her alone? Such a nose! Such eyes! And a mouth no larger than the whole of a pearl. And her figure, ah, you ought to have remarked her figure, a judge like you. I would have liked to steal her waistband to wear it as a ring.'

'Then it was through love that you allowed yourself to be throttled by her and followed her at the end of a rope?'

'I would have followed her at the end of a hair.'

'Perhaps; but there is one thing about which I am quite sure—that you will not talk at Derbend, and especially before me, about your flirtation with Gulchade.'

'Gulchade she called herself? Gulchade! What a charming name! But you make me chatter, which is why I do not ask you how you come here.'

Iskander told him very briefly what had passed between him and Mollah Nour. When he came to

the fall of the brigand over the precipice Joussouf interrupted him.

‘So he is dead, then?’ said he.

‘No.’

‘How no?’

Iskander told him how he had saved Mollah Nour, and had brought him back to his men.

‘Then he is here, this fine Mollah Nour?’

‘No, he is gone.’

‘Which way?’

‘On an expedition.’

‘You are quite sure?’

‘I saw the dust of the last rider disappear.’

‘And he fell five hundred feet, you say, yet the devil did not break his neck, nor did he fracture his arms and legs in a thousand pieces? I shall spit down the barrel of the gun of that brigand some day. Ah, if he had only come to arrest me himself instead of sending his wife, I would have taught him in what way the word *brave* was spelt. But he did not dare, the coward.’

‘There now, will you stop your fanfarronade? But if you had encountered Mollah Nour in person you would have done with all your lies and vanities, for you would have died of fright.’

‘Of fright? I? Know, my dear Iskander, that

there is only one man in the world who can make me fear, and that is the man I see in the glass when I look at myself.'

This time Iskander could not control himself. For a Tartar the boast was so big that he burst out laughing.

'Come,' said he, 'enough of this. You have just taught me more about yourself, and yet I thought I knew you thoroughly. Mount, and let us get on our road, brave Joussouf.'

'Do you know the road?'

'Yes, Mollah Nour showed it to me.'

'Very well, go first and I will follow you. It will be ill for anyone who attacks us in the rear.'

Iskander took the path pointed out to him by the bandit.

Watching them from below, no one would have believed that human beings would risk their lives on such a road.

When they had reached the snow-line Iskander gave his horse to Joussouf to hold, and with his ewer in his hand began to scale the highest point.

For the first time this virginal snow received the footprint of a man.

Iskander prostrated himself on the peak where before him clouds had alone rested.

When he raised his head and looked around, he saw the earth miraculously beautiful.

Before him lay revealed all the chain of mountains which extended from the Caspian Sea to Avarie. His eyes plunged to the depths of valleys, and in their depths he saw rivers thin and brilliant, like threads of silk.

All was still and tranquil. Iskander was too far to distinguish either men or animals, too high to hear any sounds.

He would have remained longer admiring the splendid spectacle if the air, at this height completely bereft of all terrestrial gases, had not been too pure for a human chest.

All his arteries began to beat, as though his blood, no longer sufficiently compressed by the atmosphere, was about to escape through his pores.

He therefore thought it was time to acquit himself of his commission, and in deep belief that all was possible to God, from whom nothing now seemed to separate him, he filled his ewer with snow and began to descend, whilst holding it raised above his head, so that according to the direction it should not be soiled by contact with the earth.

The descent was far more difficult than the ascent,

but a superior force had always seemed to watch over Iskander throughout this voyage.

After about an hour's absence he again rejoined Joussouf.

Joussouf questioned him, but Iskander shook his head. Joussouf tried to joke, but Iskander gravely pointed to the sky.

He went down the earth full of the sublimeness of the height.

'Ah,' said Joussouf, 'it appears that you have eaten the sun up there, and that you fear to let a morsel escape by speaking.'

But Joussouf might say what he pleased, he could not extract a single word from Iskander.

He therefore ended by becoming silent in his turn.

However much the travellers hurried, they could only arrive at Derbend at an advanced hour of the night, and long after the gates had been closed.

The heart of Iskander beat until it nearly burst his breast. Fear, doubt, hope contested at each pulsation. He hung the ewer on a branch of a tree and gazed mournfully now at the black wall which separated him from what was dearest to him in the world, now at the sky which seemed to grow cloudy. He appeared to be asking all Nature: 'Shall I fear, shall I hope?'

Soon he saw with joy that the clouds were amassing in the sky and gliding over the brilliant face of the moon.

He joyfully pressed the arm of Joussouf, who was falling asleep, saying to him :

‘Look, Joussouf, look at the clouds racing in the sky, more hurried than a flock of sheep.’

‘A flock of sheep,’ stammered Joussouf ; ‘buy the most tender, and take the ramrod of my gun to make schisleks. I am dying of hunger.’

‘Come,’ said Iskander, ‘there speaks the glutton, who as usual thinks only of his stomach ! The sheep of which I spoke are clouds, Joussouf ; it is going to rain.’

‘Ah,’ murmured Joussouf, ‘if they could have been larks, how I would have laid down in the gutter, and with my mouth wide open——’

‘Then sleep, you animal, since there is a proverb which says “He dines who sleeps.”’

‘Like us, Iskander,’ said Joussouf yawning.

And he went to sleep under his bourka. As for Iskander, he never shut his eyes all night, and never ceased looking at the sky, which became more and more clouded.

At dawn the gates of Derbend opened, and in a few minutes it was known all through the town that

Iskander was come back with the snow of Shah-Dagh.

All the inhabitants assembled until the choir of the mosque, the mosque, and the court were filled with the curious who wanted to see the water of Shah-Dagh carried to the sea.

After a short prayer the Mollahs, accompanied by the people, took the road to the sea.

Iskander timidly carried the ewer containing the melted snow ; but Joussouf, in the middle of an immense group, very loudly related the events of their journey—only in the story of Joussouf Iskander completely disappeared. He had come so near to the sky that he had heard the seven sleepers snore and the houris talking. He had suffered horribly from cold, but luckily he had warmed himself by fighting two bears and a serpent of terrifying size. He had wished to bring back the skin, and had flayed it for this purpose, but his horse was so alarmed at it that he had been obliged to leave it on the way ; but he perfectly well knew the place where it was left, and on the morrow he would send the Muerzin to fetch it.

But, however interesting the story of Joussouf, he had not a single hearer when Iskander was getting ready to pour the water from his ewer into the sea.

Since early morn it blew a gale ; but wind was not rain, and not a drop of water had fallen.

When, after a long prayer from the Mollah, Iskander was ready to empty his ewer into the Caspian Sea, he turned to Fethali, who walked in the front row.

‘Remember your promise,’ he said.

‘Remember our conditions,’ answered Fethali in his turn ; ‘your fate is not in the snow, but in the rain. You are very precious to me, if you are precious to Allah.’

Iskander lifted the ewer over his head, and before the eyes of all he poured out the water of the snow of Shah-Dagh into the sea.

Immediately, and as if by a miracle, a great tempest arose : clouds, which seemed charged with rain, covered the sky, and the sea grumbled in the distance ; the leaves, agitated violently by the wind, shook off the dust which covered them ; the young Tartar girls looked gaily through their veils, which the wind tore from their heads ; all the hands were extended to feel the first drop of the rain so impatiently awaited. At length a flash of lightning broke the vault of clouds amassed over Derbend, and it seemed as though all the cataracts of the sky were opened for a fresh deluge.

A perfect torrent of rain poured from the clouds and flooded the earth of Daghestan.

This time no one thought of running to shelter, no one even dreamt of opening an umbrella.

It was not joy, it was delirium.

The papaks were thrown into the air and fell into the water : exclamations, prayers, shouts of joy, all rose together to heaven. They embraced and congratulated one another, or pointed out the water which fell like a gigantic cataract, or rather like a hundred cascades, from the Tartar quarter to the Russian quarter, and which poured from the citadel to the sea.

Iskander was more joyous than all the inhabitants of Derbend put together.

A woman fell to him from the sky with the rain.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING A HOLY MAN.

Do not cross by a Russian bridge,
It were better to let the current carry you off.

Do not repose under the shadow of a fox,
It were better that a lion tore you in pieces.

Tartar Proverb.

WHAT is youth without love? What is love without youth?

A flame burns easily in pure air. What air is so pure as that of the Spring?

True, the walls of the Mussulman courts are high, and the bolts of their doors are solid; but the wind passes over the walls and through the key-holes.

The hearts of beautiful women are well guarded; they are hemmed in by a thousand prejudices; but Love is like the wind, and finds a passage by which to penetrate.

Kanina already loved without having the courage to confess it. Iskander Bey had become her sweetest thought by day, her fairest dream by night. Whilst

embroidering with gold thread beforehand the purse of the betrothed who she does not know (the task of every Tartar maiden), Kanina said to herself :

‘ Oh, if it could be for Iskander ! ’

Judge of her joy when her uncle ceremoniously came to tell her what had been promised to the handsome young man.

She became more ruddy than a cherry, and her heart began to beat like that of a liberated dove.

Thus were fulfilled her dearest and most secret wishes.

From this moment, her nameless hopes took the name of Iskander. From this moment, she could proudly receive the flowers and the congratulations of her companions, and in their visits to her she could speak of her future husband.

As for Iskander, he hardly felt the ground under his feet. He went with his aunt to all the shops to make purchases, and to console himself for not seeing his promised bride he perpetually thought :

‘ She will work on this carpet ; from this cup she will drink ; with the water of this silver ewer she will refresh her rosy cheeks ; beneath this satin covering she will sleep.’

In the lands of the Caucasus, where the religion of Ali is observed, wandering preachers and Mollahs

often come from Persia. They explain the Koran and relate the miracles of their Imans.

This usually occurs in the month of May.

From the first day of this month, the Chipte celebrate the death of Hussein, son of Ali, who, after the decease of his father, rose against Yesid, the son of Mouviah, with the object of wresting the Khalifa from him, but, having been defeated by Obeid-Allah, the general of the army of Yesid, he was slain in the struggle. The Chipte celebrate the anniversary of this event with great splendour. The feast takes place at night by the light of a great number of torches, and on this occasion, having come from Tebbés (Thapse) to preside over the solemnities, Mollah Sedek remained the whole month of May at Derbend.

Mollah Sedek was a man of forty-five years of age, who affected a supreme gravity, and for that reason walked as slowly as a man of seventy ; in one phrase, at twenty paces from him could be smelt the saintliness and the oil of kings.

Nevertheless, whilst Sedek lifted his eyes to heaven, he never entirely forgot the earth. He had few friends. But at least, if a man came to him with money in his hand, that man was welcome. At Derbend he had reaped a fine harvest of gifts,

but he wished to carry away something besides alms and jewels. He thought of marrying, and, after having made inquiries in the best quarters of the town, he made overtures to Hadji Fethali for his niece, who ought to be richly dowered.

He began by praising Hadji Fethali, and, as pride was the pet weakness of the uncle of Kanina, he had speedily become his most intimate friend.

‘ Ah,’ he would say to him, ‘ the end of the world cannot be long delayed, now that the fish Icoutte, on whose back the universe is built, is getting tired of bearing not only the weight of men, but the far heavier weight of their sins. Mussulmen grow corrupt. They sacrifice to money. They carry decorations in their buttonholes, ribbons of many colours on their swords. I really do not know what would have happened to Derbend, which was menaced by the Saviour, if you had not been found to put the counterpoise of your virtues against the crimes of its inhabitants. You are a pure man, a respectable man, a holy man, a true Chipte. You are not allied with the Armenians or the Russians. The only thing that I cannot and will not believe is, that you will marry your niece to this miserable Iskander, who is as poor as a dog of a Dervish. When I heard that, I said to myself, “ That

is impossible ; a man like Hadji Fethali will not throw the pearl of the Prophet into the mud, will not give the daughter of his brother to the first comer ; no, it is a lie or a jest, I am sure.”

‘And yet it is the truth,’ replied Fethali in confusion.

He told Sedek all the story—how Iskander had made the condition, and how he was forced to consent to the marriage.

‘It is true,’ he added, ‘that at Derbend there is not any swain with money. By ill-luck, all the rich are old.’

Mollah Sedek pulled his beard and said :

‘All comes from Allah. All returns to Allah. Are there not worthy adorers of Hussein in the land of Iran? The sun rises and sets twice a day in that hemisphere of the great King, and it is there you should choose a husband for your niece. By the holy Prophet, if you wish to marry the moon to one of the most beautiful stars of heaven, I will send you my cousin Mir Ferouleh Debris. He is witty and handsome. He is so rich that he does not know the number of his pearls and diamonds, yet with all that he is timid and blushes like a girl. When he walks through the bazaar everyone salutes him, and vies who shall provide him with fruits,

and cakes, and raisins. There is no fear of even the robber going to his house without a gift ; if ever your niece becomes his wife, you may be sure she will have the first place in the baths at Tebbés.'

This proposal was the more agreeable to Fethali because it would cause the despair of Iskander, whom he hated.

However, he felt guilty at thus breaking his pledged word.

He therefore replied to Sedek that if such a project could be realised it would make him the proudest and the happiest of men, but he feared one thing, namely, that the mother of Kanina would not approve of it. Further, the Governor at Derbend could easily refuse to allow an inhabitant of his town, and consequently a Russian, to marry a Persian. Finally, what would the people of Derbend say ?

'What will people say ?' has some value in Paris and Petersburg, but on the banks of the Caspian Sea, in the East, it becomes the second conscience of the man who has forgotten his own.

'What will people say ?' replied Sedek, jesting ; 'why, that you are a man of wisdom. It is pardonable to commit a fault, but honourable to repair it. And, frankly, what has Iskander done that is so

wonderful? Do you really believe it was his snow that brought the rain? Let me guide your choice, and I will show you how to retract and manage the affair. Meanwhile, say that your sister is dangerously ill, and that, under fear of death, she has sworn only to marry her daughter to a descendant of the Prophet, to an Iman. Your sister does not leave her room. Even in her room she is as silent as a fish. Do not listen to her advice. Have you not read in the sacred book that Job beat his wife because she advised him to make friends with the devil? Besides, is the mother of Kanina your wife? What is she but your sister? That is all. Spit on her wishes, then.'

'And the Governor?' asked Fethali, sighing.

'What can the Governor do? Is a Mussulman forbidden to recall his word? Besides, cannot the Governor be deceived? What prevents you taking out a passport to go to Persia to see your relatives?'

Fethali consented; or rather he had long ago consented.

The next day the Kalim (or wedding gift) he had already given to his betrothed was sent back to Iskander.

The young man, not being able to tear his hair, almost tore out his ears. It was long before he could

believe the fact, yet the bag with the money it contained was there, before his eyes. The old aunt did not understand it, and pitied him with all her heart.

Iskander was overwhelmed.

He racked his brain for every method of avenging himself on Fethali without breaking the Russian law. Oh, if there had only been a Khan at Derbend instead of a Colonel! A good thrust with a dagger would have settled the debt, and Kanina would be his.

But he must not think of this means, however expeditious it might be.

Iskander became as silent and as thoughtful as a dead man. He did not see Hadji Joussouf, who had been for some time in his presence. Apart from his cowardice and his mendacities, Hadji Joussouf was really an excellent man. He was quite touched by the emotion of Iskander, and he would have cried if he had known how.

He therefore nudged Iskander quite gently and timidly asked :

‘What is the matter, my dear Iskander?’

‘And you,’ asked Iskander, with frowning brow, ‘what do you want with me?’

‘I came to tell you that three ships laden with

barley have arrived, and that the people are very pleased. It is good news.'

'If you came to tell me that three ships laden with poison had arrived, it would be better news.'

'Oh, oh, the time is out of joint, it appears. Come, tell me what vexes you.'

'Why should I tell you? Do not you know it already? Does not all Derbend know it?'

'Is it true that the mother of Kanina refuses you as her son-in-law?'

'The mother!' Iskander burst into a peal of laughter which made Joussof shiver. 'The mother! Rather say the miserable Fethali. But I will kill him.'

'It is clear that you have not yet tasted the bread of the mountain, my poor Iskander. There is no difficulty in killing a man and then fleeing. Only, until the end of your life, you must give up all idea of returning to your native town. Now, if I might advise you, it would be to rest satisfied with giving him a fine thrashing. After which you could quietly retire to Bako. If you are set on marriage, you can be wed there for three months. It will cost you twenty-five roubles. This kind of marriage is a splendid invention, especially for travellers. I have done it. I, such as you see me, was one day married

for six weeks ; only I had not patience to complete my term. I fled at the end of a month. Whilst I slept I was always afraid she would bite my nose, so dried up and crabbed was she. Try, and I will wager that on your return you will bring me a gift out of gratitude.'

Iskander remained thoughtful and mute.

'My dear friend, my lovely lily, my proud palm, my Iskander,' resumed Hadji Joussof, 'do you not hear me? Are your ears full of wax? A betrothed! My word, what a fine thing is a betrothed after all! Take a handful of roubles and walk open-handed on the Place of Derbend, shouting, "A betrothed! a betrothed!" And betrotheds will come to you like chickens.'

Iskander continued to keep silence.

'What reason is there for your sadness, Iskander? Devil take it, your Kanina is not a star. To begin with, she has one eye bigger than the other, and she is so black that she will ruin you in powder, if in nothing else. I will even add that she is slightly humpbacked. Do not contradict. I know her. I have seen her.'

This time Iskander had heard, and he seized Joussof by the throat.

'You have seen her,' said he. 'Where have you

seen her? How have you seen her? When, in what place, have you dared raise your ill-omened eyes to her? Answer me now, you miserable wretch.'

'How do you expect me to answer, when you are strangling me? In Allah's name, let me go, then. Could you not see I was joking? You well know that I keep my eyes in my pockets, and my pockets have no holes, thank Heaven. Where could I have seen her? And when I could have seen her, why should I have looked at her? Do I not know she is the promised bride of my best friend? Never marry, Iskander, you are too jealous for a man with Russians as neighbours. You would be obliged to watch all day, and all night, to examine all who came to your house. All the same, I do not know how these devils of Russians manage. They have not been two days in the town and they are already friends with all our beauties. You know Mollah Karim? God be praised! There's a jealous man for you. Well, he had bought himself a charming wife, and, as he had paid dearly for her, he meant to keep her exclusively. His wife had only one friend in the world; it is hardly possible to have less. Three times a week the friend came to the house of Mollah Karim, who used himself to usher her in to his wife,

and would watch the door, fearing that the two friends would steal on the gallery to look into the street. Do you know what the friend was? A young Russian ensign who was still beardless.'

Iskander seized the arm of Joussouf, but this time without wrath.

'A man dressed as a woman!' said he. 'Yes, at a pinch it could be done. Thanks for your story, Joussouf, it has given me much amusement.'

'All the better. Well, now you are in a better humour, I must leave you. I have much to see to. To-night I represent the French Ambassador at the Court of Yesid. I must finish my tight-fitting trousers; I am afraid I shall never get into them. May the devil make himself a waistcoat of the skin of a Russian for having had the idea of inventing these accursed trousers. Now, if I meet a cock he may be at his ease, for I will snatch off his tail to make a plume. You will see, Iskander, how majestic I shall be when I appear on the scene. All the soldiers shout to me:

"We wish your Highness good health."

'Farewell. I have no time to lose if I am not to miss my entrance.'

And Joussouf departed, throwing over his shoulders the sleeves of his tchouka to go faster.

Iskander remained alone and pensive, but smiling

to himself in the midst of his reverie. The anecdote related by Joussouf among all his useless chatter had inspired him with an idea. It was to take advantage of the festival celebrated in the Mahometan carnival to disguise himself as a woman and get near Kanina.

Let us say, at once, that nothing could lend itself better to this disguise than the Tartar costume, with its wide trousers, its arkalouk, and the immense veil.

Since he had conceived this project he ceased to despair.

‘I shall see her,’ said he, ‘and she shall be mine. Then, Fethali, you shall know what it is to awake a tiger. Kanina, Kanina, wait for Iskander, who will come to you though the road were paved with daggers.’

At the very moment Iskander went out, and, going to the bazaar under the pretext of buying a gift for his betrothed, purchased a complete female costume.

Returning home, he sent his nouker, whose indiscretion he feared, to the field to watch over the horses. Then, the nouker departed, he completely shaved the beard which had hardly begun to show, tinted the top of the eyelids, painted the eyebrows, put on rouge, donned his trousers, the arkalouk, and

the veil, practised how to walk in his new costume in a feminine manner, and kept his bechmett to protect himself in the event of his being compelled to attack or defend himself in a masculine manner.

He awaited nightfall with impatience. But the day, like an uncle from whom you have expectations, could not make up its mind to die.

At last the drum beat to prayer and the theatre was lit up. Then Iskander put on his cheeks the two little plates which are compulsory, thrust in one side of his belt his kanjiar, in the other his pistols, enveloped himself from head to foot in an immense white veil, and departed, holding in his hand a little lantern.

He went straight to the house of Fethali and hid himself behind it, waiting for Kanina to come out.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the young girl came out with two friends, and all three went to see the religious drama performed at Derbend in honour of the death of Hussein, and which bears much resemblance to the mysteries which the Passionist confraternities used to act in France in the Middle Ages.

The public places and the streets were full of people on foot and on horseback : for it is remarkable in the spectacles of the East that, however hurried the spectators may be, at least a third are always on

horseback, and this third wanders everywhere without betraying the least anxiety for feet which may be crushed or for shoulders which may be jostled. It is the business of the pedestrians to get out of the way and to look after themselves : nothing is owed to them except the word ' Kabarda, kabarda,' ejaculated from time to time, and which corresponds to our ' Take care !'

The roofs of the houses, the only places where the riders could not climb, were covered with women enveloped in their long veils of every hue.

The drama had not yet commenced ; on the stage prepared for the representation of Yesid—so the tragedy was named—Mollah Sedek, between two Mussulmen, read the prologue, and at each touching passage he interrupted himself to cry to the spectators, ' But weep, good people, weep,' and the people replied to this appeal by moans and lamentations.

Absolutely furious, Iskander, who had followed Kanina, climbed behind her the narrow staircase which led them to the roof of a house, lighted by several torches, and already covered with a number of women.

The women embraced as they met and recognised one another, laughing and talking among themselves in endless chatter. All were richly dressed and

adorned with necklaces of gold and silver, and each showed the other, rather as to a rival than to a friend, the ornaments not seen before.

He who has not studied the Asiatic woman does not know and will never know half of an Asiatic, though he lived with him for a century. Before the *giaours*, a Mussulman woman always wears a mask, and outside the harem an Oriental never shows the bottom of his heart or the depths of his purse even to his own brother. Every race has a passion which dominates all the others. It is to boast the superiority of its own customs over all others. The Mussulman is the victim of that. If you can believe the word of the Mussulmen, you must regard them all as saints. If you listen to them, wives and husbands walk in the discharge of their duties, within the lines of the Koran, and never slip to right or left. Within doors alone the Mussulman reveals himself in his true light. This is because he has no account to render of his conduct either to his wife or his children. The wife, on the other hand, is perfectly free in the absence of her husband. Hardly has she seen the heels of his *babouches* disappear than she becomes unrecognisable. Dumb and humble before him, she becomes talkative, proud, even immodest among her companions, with whom she is always sincere, because jealousy between

women of the East does not exist ; except over the richness of attire and the value of jewels.

Thence comes this double world, completely foreign to a European, and which this book will be at least one of the first to point out and make evident the difference : a world more inaccessible to men than to women, since man perpetually reveals himself to the woman, but the woman never to the man.

Now, suppose by any manner of means—what means is no affair of mine—suppose by any manner of means you are connected with a Mussulman woman. Suppose that you have penetrated to the bath and heard her chatter with a friend, that you have entered the harem and that you have seen her—*batifuleo*,¹ that is the only word which suggests itself to my pen ; the Greek language is richer than ours—with her companions, it is clear that you have taught yourself more than a Mussulman will ever tell you, more than he knows himself.

Judge then how astonished was Iskander when he found himself in the midst of feminine indiscretions, lost among a crowd of pretty chattering young women, he who had never spoken to a woman who was under sixty. He devoured them with his eyes, he wanted to hear all they said to one another.

¹ Romp. This is the Greek word as spelt by Dumas.—*Translator's Note.*

‘Ah! my dear, how prettily your hair is done! My screw of a husband has been to Sinzily and brought me back trousers embroidered in gold. I was wrong to call him a screw, for he is not to me. He never refuses anything I ask him. It is true he is exacting, and on my side, winter or summer, I do all he wishes without troubling about the differences of seasons or of temperature.’¹

‘Do you know, Fatima,’ said another, ‘that my old husband thinks of marrying a second wife at Bako. I began to cry and to complain. Imagine his reply: “Can I remain without pillaff?” Oh, I will be revenged; he take a second wife, the old rascal, when he is not able to celebrate Saturday with me! No, on my word, no. It is extraordinary, is it not? But it is true. By-the-by, do you know that there is now an ukase in Russia ordering women to wear trousers? I have myself seen ladies in Derbend with white trousers all embroidered and festooned in open-work. It is about time. It is disgraceful to see them when it is windy.’

‘Oh, that capital soap you gave me, my dear Cheker!’ said a third. ‘I am so grateful to you.

¹ It is impossible for us here to literally reproduce the Tartar text. Modesty is a virtue absolutely unknown among Oriental women.

Imagine, after I had rubbed myself, my body became like satin.'

'Well, yes, she is dead,' said a fourth; 'he killed her, so much the worse for her. From the time she intended to be love-making with someone else, she ought to have known how to hide it. As soon as her husband went away, she was off carrying a lantern as usual. My word, he killed her brutally. Her belly was laid clean open with one cut of a dagger.'

'Ah, my dear,' said a fifth, 'how my children bore me! I never knew children grow so fast. To look at them you would think I was an old woman. Then they have headaches, would you believe it? and I never had a pin-prick. They get that from their father.'

'Oh, if your children suffer from headache, mine suffer from heartache. Megely bores me, you understand. He never gives me any peace about buying a wife for him.'

'Well, buy the boy one. He is big and handsome, and old enough to have a wife. I watched him passing by only yesterday.'

'You are kind, you are, speaking as though a woman could be whistled for, at a cost of two kopecks. A wife is costly. Where, I ask you, shall I find the money?'

‘Ah! Aie, aie,’ cried a sixth, ‘what a disgrace, my dear! You say she is with an Armenian. Are there, then, no longer any Musselmen or Russians?’

‘Oh, if you knew how good my husband is,’ said a seventh, ‘and how handsome! You might think it was the Prophet himself; and so big, so nimble, you would never believe it. I imagine that——’

Iskander listened with an attention so profound that he had almost forgotten the object for which he had come. But the cries, ‘They commence, they commence,’ put an end to all this chatter.

Everyone turned towards the theatre and paid attention to the drama. Yesid, in a red caftan and green turban, was seated on his throne. On his left, beneath him all the depth of the four steps of his throne, stood the European Ambassador, impersonated by Joussouf in a fantastic costume of which the principal ornaments were a hat with three horns surmounted by an immense plume, an enormous sword, and spurs six inches long.

The Court of Yesid, composed of followers in white turbans, surrounded his throne and formed a half circle.

Neither Yesid on his throne, nor this magnificent retinue in white turbans, made as great an impression as did Joussouf, with a hat which could not

maintain its equilibrium on his shaven head, with a sword which he did not know how to use, with spurs which caught in the trousers of the noblest lords and the most venerable dignitaries of the Court of Yesid.

But what especially aroused the greatest hilarity among the men, and the liveliest discussion among the women, was his enormous nose and this colossal plume.

‘Look, sister,’ said a pretty aristocratic girl, ‘look at that animal near Yesid. What sort of beast does he represent?’

‘It is a lion, you little silly,’ replied the elder sister; ‘do you know that this abominable tyrant Yesid, this executioner of caliphs, had always a lion near him, so that whoever displeased him was thrown to the lion of Yesid, which devoured him? Listen! there is Yesid telling Hussein, “Adopt my religion, or I will have you put to death.” Hussein shakes his head, which means “I will not.”’

‘It is not a lion,’ insisted the obstinate little one; ‘lions have no beaks—it is a bird.’

‘A bird with a tail on its head. Have you ever seen birds with tails on their heads?’

‘No doubt it is a tuft.’

‘It is a mane.’

‘The little one is right,’ said a third, mingling in

the dispute. 'Do you not see it is a parrot? This parrot was secretary bird of Yesid. Watch how he caresses it.'

'Then why does he shriek like a devil?'

'Do hold your tongue, maligner of parrots, yourself,' said a good Tartar lady weighing one hundred and fifty kilos, taking up the room of four ordinary people, and anxious to hear both on her own account and for those around.

The dispute became general at this rebuke, some continuing to pretend it was a lion, the others sustaining it was a bird; but what should have enormously flattered Joussof was that all were unanimously of opinion that it was some sort of animal.

He, never imagining that all this murmur he heard was caused by his nose and his plume, was meanwhile pronouncing a discourse to the tyrant.

'My sovereign, the lord of Frangistan,' said he, 'learning of your conquests, sends me to proffer his friendship.'

Yesid replied:

'Let your King cease to eat pork, let him forbid his allies to eat it, and let him command them to become Mussulmen.'

'But if the allies refuse?' answered the Ambassador.

‘Then let him introduce my system.’

‘What is your system?’ asked the Ambassador.

‘Introduce my system,’ said Yesid.

An executioner entered with a drawn sword in his hand.

Joussouf shook his head.

‘What do you mean to imply?’ asked Yesid.

‘I mean to imply that your system would not answer in Europe, noble prince.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it would be impossible to cut off a European head as you would cut off an Arabian head.’

‘Impossible,’ said Yesid; ‘you shall see if it is impossible.’

And turning to his guards and the executioner:

‘Take the European Ambassador,’ said he, ‘and cut off his head, so that he may see that my system can be applied to all nations.’

The guards and the executioner advanced to Joussouf, but so short a time had elapsed since he had acted in a similar scene with Mollah Nour that fiction and fact were confounded together in his eyes and imagination. Seeing the guards ready to lay hands on him, he wished to run away; seeing the executioner raise his sword, he uttered piercing cries. He was stopped as he was about to jump from the

stage into the street, and was dragged off amid frantic applause from the crowd, who had never witnessed so life-like a simulation of terror.

Long after he was behind the curtain at the back of the stage, he could be heard shouting to Iskander to come to his assistance.

But Iskander had something better to do than to comply.

Iskander had managed to glide near Kanina. He could hardly breathe for joy. His heart burned, he felt the warmth of Kanina's cheeks, he inhaled the perfume of her breath.

What would you have? He was a Mussulman. He was twenty years of age and in love for the first time.

But he could contain himself no longer when, rising to seat herself more at her ease, Kanina leant her hand on his knee.

'Kanina,' he murmured in her ear, 'I must speak to you.'

And he gently pressed her hand.

The heart and the mind of the young girl were full of Iskander. She hoped to see him in this festival, at which all Derbend was present. It was not for Yesid that she had come. It was not the Caliph's executioner who occupied her attention.

On all sides her gaze had searched for Iskander, and nowhere had she seen him.

Judge, then, of her surprise, understand her fear, when she heard close at her ear that well-known voice, those beloved tones.

She had not strength to resist.

Iskander rose, she followed. He led her to the darkest corner of the roof.

Those around were so absorbed in Yesid that the pair had nothing to fear.

Iskander, however, understood that there was no time to spare.

‘Kanina,’ he said to her, ‘do you know I love you—do you know I adore you? You see what I have done in order to see you for an instant to say a few words to you. Then understand what I am capable of doing if you say to me: “Iskander, I do not love you.” Yes or no, Kanina; yes or no.’

The eyes of Iskander shot flames through his veil, his left arm clasped Kanina’s waist, his right hand his pistol. The poor child trembled as she looked around her.

‘Iskander,’ she said, ‘I only ask two things: do not kill me and do not dishonour me. I should love to clasp you in my arms as tightly as does your sword belt, but you know my uncle.’

Then, carried away in spite of herself, after a last moment's hesitation :

‘ Iskander,’ said she, ‘ I love you.’

And her lips, like iron on a magnet, pressed the lips of the young man.

‘ And now,’ said she, ‘ let me go.’

‘ So be it ; but on one condition, love, that we see each other to-morrow by night.’

Kanina did not answer, but the word ‘ to-morrow ’ was so clearly written in the look she threw her lover when leaving him, that Iskander understood the appointment was accepted.

I cannot tell you how Kanina passed the night, but the sleep of Iskander was very pleasant.

On some sins one sleeps better than after the most prosperous business.

CHAPTER III.

M. T.

Epigraph of the Koran.¹

TWO days after the festival there was a grand assembly in the fortress of Narin Kale, near the house of the commandant.

Armed noukers held the bridles of their masters' horses. Plenty of people were in the courts round the fountain, and on the staircase. The *salon* was full of visitors, and they the first people in the town : at the entrance, the interpreter of the commandant hotly related something which was no doubt extraordinary, for he was heard and questioned. Also everywhere people spoke low, the old men with shrugs of the shoulders. To sum up, it was easy to see something strange and unusual was going on or had already been accomplished.

¹ At the commencement of several chapters of the Koran, instead of a title Mahomet put some letters of the Arabic alphabet. He and Allah alone know what these letters mean.

‘Yes,’ said the interpreter, ‘this is literally how it all happened. The brigands made an opening in the wall and entered the room of Solyman Kek. He awoke, but only when one of the brigands was carrying off his weapons, hung over his bed. Solyman then drew a pistol from under his bolster and fired, but the ball hit no one. Meanwhile two or three other brigands garrotted his wife in the adjoining room. They ran in at the sound of the shot, and came to the rescue of the two others already in the room of Solyman. Darkness prevented the blows taking effect, yet Solyman wounded three or four of the bandits. But he himself fell, killed by four or five dagger-thrusts.

‘The pistol shots and the cries of Solyman and his wife aroused the neighbours; but while they dressed and lighted their lanterns and ran to the house of Solyman, the bandits had broken open and emptied his coffers, and had departed without being seen, and consequently unrecognised.’

‘So not one of the rascals has been arrested?’ inquired a new-comer.

‘No, and yet it is believed an accomplice has been seized.’

‘An accomplice?’

‘Yes, he was placed as sentinel. He had a cord

round his body, no doubt to help his companions to scale the wall. In his belt he carried a dagger and a pistol. But it must be confessed that, as a Bey, he had the right to be armed.'

'What! As a Bey! But it is impossible that a Bey should be the accomplice of robbers,' cried several voices at the same time.

'And why is that impossible?' retorted a Mirza,¹ throwing a mocking glance round him; 'the Tartar youth dearly loves distinction.'

'Yes, but the one in yesterday's affair is really a Bey belonging to one of the best families in Derbend, and you will be very much astonished when you hear his name. It is Iskander Bey, son of Kalfasi. At this very moment the commandant is reading the report of the chief constable, and you will see Iskander directly, for the order is given to bring him here.'

The news really did astonish everybody very much. Iskander was very much pitied. How could a young man, whose conduct had been so exemplary that he had been selected to fetch the snow from Shah-Dagh, be an accomplice of such bandits?

The entrance of the commandant put an end to all discussions and a profound silence reigned. He was one of those men who admirably understood the

¹ One of the Persian nobility.

Asiatic character. He was intelligently affable, in order to make his affability the more appreciated; and severe without the harshness which envenoms justice even when it is justice.

He entered the *salon* in full uniform.

All present bowed, laying their hand on their hearts and lowering it along the thigh down to the knee.

The commandant saluted everybody, spoke a little on current affairs; some he gently reproached with the lack of zeal in their service; others he thanked for doing their duty so conscientiously; shook hands with a few of the largest landlords of Derbend—there are landlords everywhere—and invited two to dine with him next day.

Then, addressing everybody:

‘Gentlemen,’ said he, ‘you all know what occurred last night, do you not? I have reason to think it is an enterprise by our old friends, the mountaineers, and not the act of inhabitants of Derbend. I beg you to do your utmost to capture the robbers and to bring them to me. Well,’ he added, turning to the Mirza, ‘has the Mollah questioned Iskander? If he has questioned him, what has he answered?’

‘Iskander has naturally replied that he is as innocent in this affair as a new-born babe. He says

he took the cord to go for a walk outside the town and to re-enter over the wall at any hour he pleased, because he declared he was stifling in the town. As for the arms, he has given no other explanation than this : " Being Bey, I have the right to carry them." "

'A curious thing, indeed, to take a walk with a rope round the loins,' said the commandant ; 'and yet I must say that all the past conduct of Iskander protests against the crime of which he is accused. I want to see him and question him myself. Let him be brought in.'

Iskander Bey entered with his papak on his head according to Asiatic custom ; he respectfully bowed to the commandant, proudly to the company, and waited in the place indicated to him.

The commandant looked coldly at him. At the thought of the suspicion hanging over him, Iskander could not help getting red, but his look remained firm and unruffled.

'I never expected, Iskander,' said the commandant, 'to see you brought before me as a criminal.'

'It is not a crime but fate which brings me to judgment,' replied Iskander.

'Do you know the consequence of the crime of which you are accused ?'

‘I have only here learnt my supposed crime. I confess my imprudence. Appearances are against me ; that I feel. But, as for my being culpable, God knows——’

‘Unfortunately, Iskander,’ answered the commandant, ‘men must judge by visible proofs, and until your innocence is recognised you must remain in the hands of justice. However, if anyone will answer for you, I will let you go free.’

Iskander cast an interrogative glance around him, but nobody presented himself as bail.

‘What?’ said the commandant, ‘not one?’

‘At your command, Excellency,’ answered those around with a bow.

‘Well, I will answer for him and offer myself as his bail,’ said Hadji Joussof, stepping forward.

The commandant smiled, the visitors burst out laughing, but the commandant frowned and the faces grew longer.

‘Truly, gentlemen, it is surprising,’ said the commandant, ‘that you, who are so ready to go bail for the greatest scoundrels your town produces, wretches who twenty times after you have gone bail for them have fled to the mountains, should hesitate to vouch for a young man, who a week ago you recognised as the purest and most honest among you.’

His good reputation will not save him from punishment—on the contrary, he will be severely dealt with if he is proved guilty ; but until he is condemned, he is your comrade and, as your exemplary representative, should be respected. Go home, Iskander. If you had not found a bail, I should myself have acted as such for you.'

The commandant bowed to the assembly and left for the church.

The young man went home, his eyes moist with grateful tears.

The morning sun gilded the portal of the mosque of Derbend. The old men warmed themselves in the revivifying rays and talked of bygone days. Two or three beggars stood before the gate of the court.

At a few paces from them a traveller slept under his bourka. Not far from the traveller was seated the Mollah Sedek on his carpet.

The holy man was preparing to leave Derbend on the morrow morning, and was making a mental calculation of the profits which his journey had produced. Whilst making his little mental calculation he was eating a sort of pastry which he soaked in milk and oil. From time to time he dipped his quill pen into his wooden inkstand, and wrote some

words on a small piece of paper which was beside him. It was curious to see the appetite with which the man ate his breakfast and the pleasure with which he made up his accounts.

He was so absorbed in this double pleasure that he did not notice a poor Lesgian before him asking alms. The wretch demanded a kopeck with so lamentable a voice that it was really criminal to refuse him.

Mollah Sedek at length heard the sort of litany intoned by the poor devil. He lifted his eyes to him, but almost at once lowered them again to his accounts.

‘It is three days since I have eaten, master,’ said the Lesgian, with outstretched hand.

‘Ten, twenty-five, fifty, a hundred,’ said Mollah Sedek.

‘A kopeck will save my life and open the gate of Paradise.’

‘A hundred, five hundred, a thousand,’ continued Mollah Sedek.

‘You are a Mollah,’ insisted the Lesgian. ‘Remember the words of the Koran, “The first duty of a Mussulman is charity.”’

Mollah Sedek lost patience.

‘Go to the devil,’ he said, irascibly. ‘Was it for

wretches like you that Allah invented charity ? You have sticks in the town and grass in the fields ; when you are strong, you become brigands, if not, you beg for alms. And no sooner have you alms in your hand than you mock the fool who gave them. You will get nothing from me ; I, too, am a poor traveller, and all I had your brigand of a Mollah Nour took from me.'

The traveller, who was lying under his bourka and who had thus far remained silent, gently rose, stroking his beard with his hand. He politely inquired of Mollah Sedek :

'Has the Mollah Nour been so cruel as to leave you, a holy man, completely without money ? I had, however, heard that the Mollah Nour was a conscientious man, who rarely took more than two roubles from each traveller.'

'Two roubles ! This Jew of a Mollah Nour ! Rely on him, and you will be lucky if he does not take your two eyes. May he be struck by the destroying angel and boil during eternity in the gold he has robbed me of, did I have to melt the gold myself ! Did he not wish to take even my cloak of camel's hair ?'

'It is a fact,' said the old men, 'that Mollah Sedek arrived here without a farthing and only in his

cloak. But we did our best to clothe him again. May the robber Mollah Nour be accursed !'

The traveller with the bourka rose, and, smiling, drew a piece of gold from his pocket.

'Curse Mollah Nour like these honest men have just done,' said he, showing the piece of gold to the beggar, 'and this tchervonier is yours.'

The Lesgian first held out his hand, but almost immediately withdrew it, shaking his head.

'No,' said he, 'Mollah Nour helped my brother in misfortune. He gave him a hundred roubles on ten occasions. He has helped my fellow-countrymen. I do not know him by sight, but I know him by heart. Keep your gold. I will not curse Mollah Nour. I neither sell my benedictions nor my maledictions.'

The traveller looked at the Lesgian with astonishment and at Mollah Sedek with contempt.

Then, producing four other gold pieces which he joined to the first, he gave all five to the poor Lesgian.

Next, leaning one hand on the shoulder of Mollah Sedek and raising the other high above his head :

'In heaven,' said he, 'exists a God of Truth, and there are brave men on earth.'

After which, picking up his bourka, he threw it

over his shoulder, mounted his horse, which had been tied to the wall of the mosque, and slowly rode down to the bazaar.

Then, after he had traversed the bazaar, always at a walk, he passed into the street in which was the house of the Chief of Police.

This functionary was near his door, surrounded by several people to whom he rendered justice. He was already old, but dyed his beard so well that he deceived himself and imagined he was ten years younger than he really was. His tchouka was ornamented as freely as that of a dandy, and, as a much more genuine memento of his youth, he had four wives and three mistresses, whilst each night he drank several bottles of wine. Finally, if he had not worn spectacles, if he had not been as wrinkled as a dried apple, if he had not had a belly like a pumpkin, belief might have been felt in a youth which he described as being most courageous.

That day, his Excellency was in a bad temper. He was annoyed with everybody and even quarrelled with the passers-by.

While in this frame of mind, he saw a traveller dismount and approach him.

‘Salaam, Moujarame Bey,’ said the traveller.

The head of police trembled as though stung by a scorpion, and put his hand on his pistol.

But the traveller leant towards his ear and said :

‘Moujarame Bey, if I may give you advice, it would be not to touch old friends. Besides, I have come here for your good. I have a service to render you ; but let us go into your house. I will tell you a thing for which all Derbend will be grateful to me. But if you make an equivocal signal, you know that my pistol contains a bullet and this bullet goes straight where I aim, whether it be with my eye or my finger ; therefore, at the first sign, I fire. I seem to be alone, but don't rely on that. A dozen of my brave fellows do not lose sight of me, and will run together at my first call.

‘So show me the way, Moujarame Bey.’

The head of police made no objection and went first.

What passed at the interview, as the interview was without witnesses, no one can say.

It is only known that a quarter of an hour after he had entered, the unknown came out, calmly mounted his horse, threw a silver rouble to the nouker who had held the bridle, and quietly left the town.

Two days later, folk said that the famous brigand Mollah Nour had managed to pass through the town ; that, thanks to his active vigilance, the head of police was warned of his coming and had sent twelve noukers after him, and that Mollah Nour was pleased to show them the heels of his horse.

Badly brought-up folk said much worse things, but it never does to believe badly brought-up folk.

During this time poor Iskander grew more sad within the four walls of his house. He had only to say one word to prove his innocence. But he preferred to die a hundred times rather than dishonour Kanina.

The delay of judgment is a hell for all inhabitants of Asia ; an Asiatic suffers punishment which he has not deserved better than the merited judgment if too long delayed.

‘ Ah,’ cried Iskander, in his impatience, ‘ the eternal chains, the snows of Siberia, all rather than the suspicions of the Russians who force me to love them, and the mockery of the fellow-countrymen I detest. I am content to die by the sword, but by the axe is to die twice.’

And, hampered by his promise, he roared whilst bounding like a tiger in his rage, tearing the sleeves of his tchouka and crying like a child.

At night, when all the streets grew deserted, when the houses woke up with voices and lights ; at night, when the Mussulman husband tastes repose of soul near the wife or even near the four wives which the Prophet permits, and when, on the contrary, the celibate grows sad by his fireside ; Iskander by his, with his head buried between his two hands, heard one of his window-panes broken by the force of some article, and this article fell into his room.

The article was a pebble to which was attached a note.

He unfolded it and read :

‘ Mollah Nour to Iskander—Greeting. Better be captive and innocent than guilty and free—believe me.

‘ I know all. I will do all that is possible for your innocence to be known.

‘ The rest is in the hands of Allah.

‘ Be patient and hope, your deliverance will not be long delayed.’

On the morrow Iskander was summoned to the house of the commandant, but he had not time to arrive before everyone was already congratulating him on the happy termination of his trouble.

The brigands were taken. They had met at Bakhtiyari to divide their booty. There they had been surrounded and arrested.

Two were Lesgians, two townsfolk.

In the house of one of them was a double wall, and between the two walls were the stolen articles.

Iskander Bey was absolutely innocent.

In his turn Iskander, profoundly touched by the consideration shown to him by the commandant, asked for a private interview and then told him everything—his love for Kanina, and the broken word of Fethali.

The commandant listened, half smiling, half sad.

‘Iskander,’ he said, ‘see yourself to what an imprudence brought you. Granted, Fethali deceived you; but revenge on a deceiver is not accomplished by becoming a deceiver oneself. It is not only thefts of money that are thefts. An honest man does nothing secretly. Secrecy and night are the cloaks of robbers and ravishers. Your future happiness is in your own heart. I will do what I can to make it pass from your heart into your life. Good-bye, Iskander. In the name of those who love you, I beg you remain what you

are, but what you almost ceased to be—an honest man.'

And he affectionately pressed his hand whilst repeating his wishes for his happiness.

Iskander was proved innocent, Iskander was free. But the joy of this double happiness only lasted an instant. It was so sad for the young man to think he had to renounce Kanina.

The kiss he had taken from her lips was engraved on his heart. He minutely remembered all the details of his last interview with his beloved. His soul seemed ready to take flight at the memory of that soft voice, whose echo it had become. 'No,' said he, 'Mollah Nour has written me nonsense, and, as for what the commandant has said to me, it is plain he is not in love. I am ready to purchase Kanina even by a crime, and I am sure in spite of the crime I should be happy.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE MILLER.

Do you know the Tengua ?

Sometimes it is a brook, sometimes a torrent, sometimes a stream, occasionally a river.

It flows pent up for a quarter of a verst in a narrow cavern ; with horror it buries itself therein ; with fury it traverses it.

The tempests of several centuries have not washed the black stains of fire from the walls of the cavern in which the Tengua flows.

Whole rocks, precipitated from the top of the mountain to the depths of the abyss, have become the bed on which the stream foams and bounds, furiously and tumultuously.

The surroundings of this cave are dark and wild ; the entrance to it is formidable.

The right bank of the torrent casts the shadow of its rocks far over the valley.

The left bank inundates with water a narrow path which first traverses a small wood.

Woe to the rider who attempts to struggle against this liquid hell without a guide, especially at the time of thaw, when the snow melts.

Woe to him if he meets brigands in this place, which seems expressly made for an ambuscade; defence and flight are there impossible.

Here Mollah Nour—that same bandit from the leaf of whose life we are to-day taking a page—this same Mollah Nour with a dozen comrades stopped three regiments returning with enormous plunder from the expedition of General Pankratieff.

When they were about to descend to the river, he appeared in front of them on horseback, and, fully armed, threw his bourka on the ground and said :

‘Comrades, I salute you. May your thresholds be as high as your hands, which have been raised over your enemies! Allah has granted you victory and spoils. Honour be to you for it. But it would be like the good Christians that you are to make me the partner of your joy. I do not extort, I entreat. Be kind, and let each one of you give me what he pleases. Consider, brethren: you are returning wealthy, bearing gifts to your relations. I am a poor man who has no home; and for a

moment's rest in the house of another man I have to pay a handful of gold. Yet learn this, my brothers : men have cowardly despoiled me of all. Fortunately, Allah has left me valour. He has also given me these gloomy caverns and these bare rocks which you despise. I am king of these rocks and caves, and no one crosses my lands without my permission. There are many of you, and you are brave ; but if you wish to pass by force, it will cost you much blood and even more time, for you will not pass until I and my valiant band have fallen. Every stone will fight for me, and will come to life for that purpose. I will here shed the very last drop of my blood ; I will here burn my last grain of powder.

‘ Choose ; you have much to lose, and I nothing. I am called Light,¹ but I swear to you my life is more sombre than darkness.’

A murmur arose in the ranks of the riders ; the brows of some contracted, others grew very angry.

‘ We will trample Mollah Nour under the feet of our horses,’ said the latter, ‘ and we will pass on. See how many we are and how few you are. Forward, and charge the bandits !’

¹ In Tartar, Nour means Light.

But no one would be the first to risk himself in the roaring river, the ford of which was defended by the guns of a dozen brigands.

Valour gave way to discretion, and the three regiments yielded to the demands of Mollah Nour.

‘We will give what we like and nothing more,’ they said ; and so saying, each rider threw a piece of silver on the bourka of the bandit ; ‘but remember that by force you could not have obtained one nail from our horseshoes.’

One by one they passed Mollah Nour.

Mollah Nour saluted them, smiling.

‘By Allah,’ he said, after this adventure had brought him in three or four thousand roubles, ‘it is not difficult to shear the wool of the sheep of Daghestan when I have shaved the skin of the wolves of Karaback. I do not see what these men of Daghestan have to complain of with regard to the harvest. I do not take the trouble to sow, nor to plough, nor to harrow. I place myself on the road and I pray ; my prayer brings me in an ample harvest. The only necessity is to know how to set to work, and not only from each coach, but from each muzzle of a gun, may be obtained a small coin.’

But at the beginning of the summer of that year

in which took place the events we have just related, Mollah Nour had not been heard of; Mollah Nour had not been seen on the banks of the Tengua. Where was he, then? Perhaps in the province of Tchetchine; perhaps in Persia, where he might have been forced to take refuge, perhaps he was dead.

No one knew. Not even Mollah Sedek, who had pretended he had been plundered by him on his journey from Persia to Derbend.

He had left Kouba very early, had this worthy, this respectable Mollah Sedek, and about noon he had arrived at this place, where the Tengua, having shaken off the chains of the river, regains its liberty. Miserly as the sand of the desert, he would not take a guide, to whom he would have had to give for his trouble a few small pieces of the money he had gathered in by the bushel at Derbend.

The June sun seemed horribly hot, and our Mollah as he travelled kept perpetually shifting his gun from his right shoulder to his left, and from his left back to his right.

When from afar he saw the little wood, he was highly pleased. But when quite close to it he saw the river, he was nearly in despair.

Never had it been so high, so turbulent, so angry.

‘Devil take me,’ he murmured, ‘even if the river

were rolling over gold and silver instead of rocks, had I known what it was like I would not have tried to cross it without a guide. Truly I must have been a fool not to have taken one.'

And he looked all round him with terror. His surroundings were barren and dumb.

Yet, on searching with more care, he discovered fastened to a tree in the forest a horse saddled and bridled, and under the same tree a simple Tartar peasant, completely unarmed with the exception of his kanjiar, a weapon without which a Tartar is never seen abroad.

Mollah Sadek approached step by step and attentively looked at him.

The flower which whitened his coat and his beard indicated that he was a miller. This miller was eating.

Our holy man, who had felt his heart palpitate for a moment, grew reassured.

'Eh, my friend,' cried he to the unknown, 'it seems to me you are a native here. Is it not so?'

'Of course I come from these parts,' replied the miller, with his mouth full.

'In that case, if you are a native, you must know the fords of this river.'

'I should think I ought to know all the fords of

the Tengua, since it only flows with my permission such as you see it ; the river is my servant.'

'You will be very useful to me, my good man, and Allah will bless you, if you will conduct me to the other side of the cavern.'

'Wait till nightfall,' calmly replied the miller ; 'between now and night the river will fall, my horse will rest, and I shall be refreshed. A quarter of an hour will then suffice to cross the cavern, whilst now it is dangerous.'

'In the name of Allah, in the name of Ali and Hussein, in the name of my prayers, I am a Mollah, and I implore you to lead me now, without delay, at this moment.'

'Oh,' said the miller, 'there is no prayer or blessing which would make me cross the Tengua at such a flood.'

'Let yourself be persuaded, my friend ; Allah will reward you, be sure of that, if you do something for a Mollah.'

'Mollah as much as you like, but I shall not run the risk of drowning myself, even to guide the Prophet himself.'

'Do not scorn me. I am, perhaps, not so poor as you think, and if you render me a service it will not be for nothing.'

The miller smiled.

‘Well, let us see what you will give,’ he said, scratching his beard.

‘I will give you two abbas;¹ I hope that is reasonable.’

‘Good! Two abbas. With two abbas I should not even have enough to get my horse shod. No, I will not conduct you even for two roubles. For two roubles I cannot buy myself a head, and I simply risk my head in this dreadful crossing.’

They bargained for a long time. At length Mollah Sadek ended by giving the sum that the miller demanded.

Letting his guide take the bridle of his horse, Mollah Sadek completely put his trust in him and gave himself entirely up to his experience. The holy man nearly died of fright when they began to traverse the river and to go under the pent of the cavern. But when he began through the other aperture to see the valley covered with grass, and flowers illuminated with sunshine, his courage returned, and thinking he had nothing more to fear:

‘Come, get on a little faster, you cur,’ he said to his guide.

But our brave Mollah became brave a little too

¹ About eighteenpence of our money.

soon ; it was especially towards the end of the ford that the river grows deeper and more dangerous.

The guide stopped just at this place, and turning his horse :

‘Well, Sadek,’ he said, ‘you have not more than ten paces to go and you will be on the bank ; now let us settle our account. You know that I have well earned my gold piece, eh?’

‘A gold piece! Have you a conscience, my friend? No doubt you are jesting. I might as well have had a bridge of silver built for my transit. Have done, then, my good fellow. On the other side I will give you your two abbas and you can take yourself off.’

‘Well, it seems to me that we had made a better arrangement than that.’

‘No doubt, no doubt. From necessity. You put a dagger to my throat, and I had to cross. Where do you suppose a poor traveller would get so much money? Alas! I have already been robbed. Come, come, take me to the other side, brother, and then you can go about your business and I about mine.’

‘No, no,’ said the miller, shaking his head, ‘I have told you, and I repeat it, I shall not leave this spot until I have settled my account with you, and our account does not date from your crossing to-day.

You have no conscience, Mollah Sadek, but you have a memory. In order to inspire more pity and to obtain more money at Derbend, you invented that Mollah Nour had despoiled you and taken everything from you. Tell me, where did this occur ?'

'I never said so,' cried Mollah Sadek ; 'may Allah punish me if I ever said that.'

'Remember the courtyard of the mosque, Sadek. Remember what you said to the Lesgians, what you related to the traveller who slept on his bourka, and now look at me as I look at you, that is to say, face to face, and perhaps we shall recognise each other.'

'Mollah Sadek looked at his guide. Beneath the flour which had covered him, he had been at first unrecognisable. But the flour having little by little disappeared, his white beard had become black ; beneath his dark and frowning eyebrows gleamed a pair of black eyes. Seeing that the other had no weapon except his dagger, Mollah Sadek seized his gun, but before he could raise it the point of the kanjiar was at his chest.

'If you move a single hair of your moustache,' cried the sham miller, 'I warn you that, like Jonah, you will go to preach to the fish, not to drink wine or brandy. Come, come, throw down your gun, throw down your sword. Your business is to cheat the

people in the shops, and in the pulpit ; to lie in the morning, to lie in the evening ; to lie everywhere and to lie always. But fighting is the trade of brave men. Therefore it is not yours. Do not stir, I tell you, you son of a dog. Here, I have not even the necessity to waste a charge of powder on you and that is why I did not take your gun. I have only to let go the bridle of your horse and in five minutes you will be a corpse.'

At these words Mollah Sadek became pale as wax and trembled like a Jew. He clutched the mane of his horse, feeling that his brain was reeling, and as if he were about to fall from the saddle, but he never for an instant lost sight of the accursed kanjiar, which gleamed like a flash of lightning at his chest.

He could only articulate the words :

'Mercy, I am a Mollah !'

'I am also a Mollah,' replied his guide, 'and even more than a Mollah. I am the Mollah Nour !'

Mollah Sadek uttered a cry and fell over the mane of his horse, clutching at his own neck with both hands as though he already felt on it the sharp edge of the cold steel.

Mollah Nour laughed heartily at the terror of Sadek, then helping him up he said :

'You dishonoured me by the tale you narrated to

the inhabitants of Derbend. You made everybody believe I had robbed you down to your last kopeck, down to your last shirt. I, who give the piece of bread to the poor man for which he has begged in vain at the door of the rich. I, who even from the merchants themselves never take more than a piece of gold, and that not for myself, but for my companions : for my companions, who, if I did not restrain them, would plunder and slay without shame and without remorse. There is yet more. It is you who are the thief, for you wished to rob your guide by refusing what you had promised to him. And it is you who are a murderer, because when I claimed what was my just due you wished to assassinate me.'

'Have pity on me, forgive me, good Mollah Nour !' pleaded Sadek.

'Have you ever pitied the fate of the poor you saw dying of hunger? Would you have felt remorse if you had killed me? No, for you are a miserable wretch. You have coined money out of every verse of the Koran, and for your own ends and for your own profit you have sown discord among families. I knew you. I knew the sort of man you were, and I never touched you on your way to Derbend when you passed by here. You did not see me, you did not meet me, you did not know me,

and you insulted me. Well, now you shall not lie in saying I robbed you. Give me your money, Mollah Sadek.'

Mollah Sadek gave vent to loud cries, shed his tears, but he was caught and he had to give in. He threw all his poor roubles one after the other into the sack which Mollah Nour held out to him, clutching each one before letting it go, as if the oil of the silver could stick to his fingers.

At length, coming to the last :

'That is all,' said he.

'You will tell lies even in your grave, then,' cried Mollah Nour. 'Look here, Sadek, if you do not wish to become more intimately acquainted with my dagger, count better. You have still silver or rather gold in the inside pocket of your tchouka. I know the amount and I can tell it to you—one thousand five hundred roubles. Is that right?'

Sadek made loud lamentation, but he was obliged to deliver up the very last rouble. Mollah Nour had spoken the truth, he knew the sum.

Then Mollah Nour guided him to the bank of the river, which he had so ardently desired to reach, and made him dismount from his horse.

Mollah Sadek believed he had done with the brigand, but he was mistaken.

‘This is not all,’ he said ; ‘you have stopped the marriage of Iskander Bey, and it is for you to mend what you have broken. You have a bottle of ink in your belt. Write to Hadji Fethali and tell him that on the road you have received a letter from your brother, in which he tells you that your nephew does not wish to marry, and has gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Say he is dead if you like. You ought to have no difficulty in lying like the devil. Only arrange it in such a manner that Iskander marries his betrothed. Otherwise it will yet be my duty to marry you to the houris of Paradise, Mollah Sadek.’

‘Never,’ cried Mollah Sadek, ‘never. No, no, no. That shall never be. You have taken everything I possessed. Content yourself with what you have taken.’

‘Oh, that is it, is it?’ said Mollah Nour.

He clapped his hands three times, and after the third time a dozen brigands appeared, just as if they came out of the rocks.

‘The respectable Mollah Sadek desires to write,’ said Mollah Nour to them ; ‘assist him, my friends, in this laudable desire.’

In a moment, even if this was indeed his desire, Mollah Sadek had nothing more to ask for. One of

them unfastened his ink-bottle, another dipped a pen in the ink, another presented him with paper, and finally another, by leaning his hands on his knees and lowering his shoulders, offered him his back for a desk.

Three times did Mollah Sadek begin to write, but three times either from fright or from ill-will he desisted.

‘Well?’ asked Mollah Nour, in a voice which was the more menacing because it seemed perfectly calm.

‘The ink is bad and my head is so troubled that I cannot think of the words.’

‘Then write with your blood and think with your papak,’ said Mollah Nour, again making his terrible kanjiar gleam; ‘but write your quickest, for otherwise I will put such a point between your eyebrows that the devil alone will be able to say which letter of the alphabet you resemble.’

Mollah Sadek understood that his hesitation had lasted long enough, and made up his mind at last to write.

‘Now put your seal on it,’ commanded Mollah Nour when the letter was finished. Mollah Sadek obeyed.

‘There, give it to me,’ added Mollah Nour. ‘I will be responsible for posting it.’

He took the letter, read it, assured himself that it was as he wished, thrust it into his pocket, and then, pouring over Mollah Sadek all he had taken from him :

‘ There is your gold and your silver, Mollah Sadek,’ said he. ‘ Take it back. Not a kopeck is missing ; and now, which of us is the miser or the thief ? Say ! All the same, this is not a gift, it is a payment. You have blackened my name at Derbend, you will have to regild it at Schumakh and that before the people, when the mosque is full. Go now, and know if you do not fulfil my orders my bullet will find you, no matter how carefully you may hide. You are convinced that I know everything. I will prove to you that I can do everything.’

Mollah Sadek promised to do all the brigand exacted from him, counted his money with great joy, put it back in his pockets, after having assured himself that there were no holes in them, and, remounting his horse, departed at full gallop.

Two days later Mollah Sadek scandalised the inhabitants of Schumakh by a discourse in which he sang the praises of Mollah Nour, comparing him to a lion having in his breast the heart of a dove.

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Probably the letter written to Fethali by his friend Mollah Sedek did not leave the former with any hope for the union on which he had counted, because a week after the letter had been delivered at his abode singing and music could be heard by night in Derbend.

The beautiful Kanina was being led to the house of her betrothed Iskander.

All Derbend followed her ; shouts and exclamations rent the air in every sense, and from the roof of every house innumerable gun-shots seemed to be shot off like noisy furies.

The whole town seemed to rejoice in the happiness of Iskander.

Iskander Bey, hearing the noise and the music, had approached the door twenty times and each time custom had forbidden him to open it.

At last, on the twenty-first time, as the procession was almost at his threshold, and he was half-opening the door, and timidly putting his head out, a horseman held out his hand, saying :

‘ Iskander, may Allah grant you all the happiness I wish you ! ’

And instantly he turned his horse round, so as not to be entangled in the middle of the crowd.

But in turning his horse he found himself face to

face with Joussouf Bey, who was naturally Iskander's best man.

Joussouf Bey recognised the rider and could not restrain a cry of terror :

‘ Mollah Nour.’

As may be imagined, this familiar name threw a great consternation on the festivity.

The cry of ‘ Mollah Nour ! ‘ Mollah Nour ! ’ was heard on every side.

‘ Here ! There ! Catch him ! Hold him fast ! ’ shouted about six thousand voices.

But Mollah Nour had darted off, quick as a flash of lightning.

All the young Beys, who were following the bridal procession on horseback, started off in pursuit of the brigand.

Mollah Nour did not run, he literally flew through the town of Derbend, and the sparks flying from the hoofs of his horse could alone be discerned in the darkness.

But as the gates of the town were closed, Mollah Nour could not get out.

Several shots fired at him illumined his course, and it was seen that that course was in the direction of the sea.

There he would find himself between the two walls and the water.

The brigand paused for one moment. The sea was rough, the waves could be seen breaking amid foaming spray, and its roar was plainly audible.

‘He is taken, he is ours; death to Mollah Nour,’ cried those who pursued him.

But Mollah Nour’s whip whistled like the wind, gleamed like lightning, and his horse jumped from the summit of the rock on which he had paused for a moment into the midst of the waves.

Those who followed him pulled up when the waves of the Caspian Sea laved the legs of their horses.

They peered, putting their hands to their eyes, and trying to pierce the darkness.

‘He is lost! Drowned! Dead!’ at length shouted his pursuers.

AMMALAT BEY

PREFATORY EXPLANATION OF THE MANNER IN
WHICH THE FOLLOWING NARRATIVE CAME
INTO MY POSSESSION.

I WAS at Derbend, visiting the town with the iron gates, when the conversation at breakfast in the house of the Commandant of the Fortress turned on the novelist Marlynsky, who is no other than the Bertucheff, banished to the mines of Siberia for the conspiracy of 1825, and whose brother was hung in the citadel of Petersburg, with Pertel Mouravieff, Zakhoski, and Rayteef.

Exempted from toil in the mines in 1827, Bertucheff was made a soldier and sent to the army in the Caucasus. Brave, and desperately hurling himself into all dangers, he had soon obtained the grade of ensign, and with this rank he had lived for a year in the fortress of Derbend.

In my 'Voyage in the Caucasus' will be found the account of the new catastrophe which made him so disgusted with life, and how, in an encounter with the Lesgians, he caused himself to be killed by them—a death as voluntary as suicide.

Among the papers left in his room at his death was a manuscript which remained in the hands of the commandant. This manuscript has since been read by several people, amongst others the daughter of the commandant, who spoke of it to me as a romance full of interest. On her recommendation, I had it translated, and, like her, finding not only a strong story, but also a very remarkable local colouring in the little novel, I resolved to publish it. Consequently, taking it from the hands of the translator, I rewrote it to make it comprehensible to French readers, and such as it was, without altering anything, I am publishing it, convinced that it will have the same effect on others that it produced on me.

ALEXANDER DUMAS.

TIFLIS: *December 22, 1858.*

CHAPTER I.

Be slow to offend and prompt to avenge.¹

It was a Friday.

Near Bouinaki, a large village in the north of Daghestan, the Tartar youths had met for horse races, accompanied by all the experiences that daring and bravery could add to a festivity of this nature.

Let us give some notion of the splendid country in which the scene is laid.

Bouinaki rises on the two slopes of a craggy mountain and dominates the environment.

On the left of the road that goes from Derbend to Larki can be seen the crest of the Caucasus, covered with forests.

On the right is the shore which the Caspian Sea laves with an eternal murmur, or rather, an eternal lamentation.

The day was drawing to an end.

¹ Inscription engraved on the daggers in Daghestan.

The inhabitants of the village, attracted by the freshness of the air more than by curiosity at a spectacle too often witnessed not to be familiar, had left their work, had descended the pent of their mountain, and assembled in groups on both sides of the road.

The women, without veils, with silken handkerchiefs of bright colours wound like turbans on their heads, with long silken dresses drawn to the figure by their short tunics, and with large Kanäanian trousers, were seated in rows, whilst the children ran about.

As for the men, assembled as we have said in groups, they either stood up or else squatted in Turkish fashion. The old men smoked Persian tobacco in their little Tchetchersian pipes. A gay hubbub was audible everywhere, and amid this continual noise was heard from time to time the thud of the hoofs of a horse on the stones of the road and the cry of 'Katch, Katch'—'make room, make room'—from the riders preparing for the race.

Nature in Daghestan is resplendent in the month of May: thousands of roses cover the granite with a tint as fresh as the first light at dawn. The air is heavy with their perfumes, the nightingales cease-

lessly sing amid the budding verdure of the woods. Joyous flocks of sheep, embellished, cleaned, and dyed orange colour, which the shepherds, full of attention for them, make of the same stuff as their masters dye the nails of their hands and their feet, namely with henna, are leaping on the rocks. The oxen plunge into the marshes, where they idly flounder, and look at the passing traveller with deep eyes, which would seem threatening were they not meditative. The steppes are covered with fogs of all colours. Each wave of the Caspian glitters like the scales of a gigantic fish. Finally, something of that seductiveness of air, of sky, of atmosphere which whispered the instinctive and divinatory inspiration to the Greeks, that here the world was born, and that the Caucasus was its cradle, can be breathed with each respiration, and whilst revivifying the body rejoices the heart.

Such is the impression which the native or the stranger would have felt in drawing near the village of Bouinaki on this joyous Friday, when the events we have undertaken to relate, began.

So the sun gilded the dark walls of the huts with flat roofs, the shadows of which grew larger and more clearly indicated as the sun sank. In the distance could be heard the cry of the plaintive

arabas,¹ the long file of which could be distinguished through the Tartar stones, set up like phantoms in a cemetery, and in front of the noisy procession galloped a rider who raised a cloud of dust on the road.

The snowy crest of the mountains and, on the opposite side, the calm azure and boundless sea gave to this picture a noble magnificence.

Creation could be felt living its warmest and most ardent existence.

‘It is he, it is he; he is coming, there he is!’ cried the crowd at the sight of this dust and the rider it concealed, but whose identity was already guessed.

At these cries, a great movement was perceptible in the throng.

The riders, who till now had remained on foot, conversing with their acquaintances, with the bridle on their arm, jumped on their horses. Those who galloped to right or left without order and according to their caprice gathered together, and all went at top speed to meet the rider and his train.

¹ The *arabas* are the Tartar carts, the wheels of which, never greased owing to the repugnance of their proprietors for pork, yield at each revolution of the wheel a wail which can only be compared to that of the Spanish *norias*.

The rider was Ammalat Bey, the nephew of Chamkal¹ Tarkowski.

He carried a black tchouka of Persian shape ornamented with those elegant trimmings of which the makers in the Caucasus alone possess the secret. The half-hanging sleeves were thrown back at the extremity on to the shoulders. His arkabouk of tarmalama was confined at the waist by a Turkish shawl. His red trousers were thrust into yellow boots with high heels ; his gun, his dagger, and his pistols were mounted in silver damascened in gold. The hilt of his sword was garnished with precious stones. Added to this, the heir of the Chamkal Tarkowski was four and twenty, was handsome, well-made, of an open countenance : in addition to which long curls of black hair fell from his papak to his neck ; small moustaches, black as ebony, which seemed drawn with a pencil, adorned his lip ; his eyes shone with haughty good-nature ; he rode a black charger which ran away every moment ; he was seated on a Circassian saddle embroidered with silver ; his feet rested in black steel stirrups from Khorasan, ornamented with gold ; twenty noukers in embroidered tchoukas galloped around him on splendid horses, and you can explain to yourself the effect produced by

¹ Arabic title equivalent to Kness in Russia and Prince among us.

the arrival of the young prince among this population, with whom wealth, grace, and beauty—the charming externals with which Heaven endows its elect, have such supreme influence and irresistible sway.

The men rose and saluted with a bow, whilst they laid their hands on their hearts.

A murmur of joy, of esteem, and above all of admiration, was audible among the women.

Arrived in the midst of all this concourse, Ammalat Bey stopped.

The old men leant on their sticks, and the principal inhabitants of Bouinaki surrounded him, hoping that the young Bey would speak to them, but the young man never even looked at them.

He only made a sign with his hand to commence racing.

Some twenty riders then began to gallop without any order, each endeavouring to outstrip his neighbour.

Then all took a sort of javelin, and threw them to each other whilst galloping.

The most dexterous picked them up without putting foot to the ground, and by letting themselves slip almost under the bellies of their horses. The less skilled, desiring to imitate them, rolled in the dust, amid the outbursts of laughter of the spectators.

The firing began.

During all the while the race had lasted, Ammalat Bey had remained apart, but his noukers had allowed themselves to be attracted, and had mingled with the competitors.

Two only had stayed with the prince.

But as the races grew more animated, and the noise of the blows of the whips re-echoed, as the smoke of the powder mingled its acrid odour with the atmosphere, the coldness of the young prince seemed to dissolve. He began to encourage the combatants and to urge them on with his voice, raising himself in his stirrups ; and when his beloved nouker missed with the bullet of his gun the papak he had thrown into the air in front of him, he could no longer contain himself, but seized his gun and threw himself at full gallop among the marksmen.

‘Room for Ammalat Bey’ was shouted on all sides.

And each cleared out of the way as quickly as though the shout had been :

‘Room for the water-spout, room for the hurricane.’

Within a verst had been planted ten staves, each surmounted with a papak.

Ammalat Bey put his horse at a gallop, passed

them all from first to last, holding his gun above his head ; then, when he had passed the last, he turned, and, standing in his stirrups, fired without pausing.

The papak fell.

Then, without stopping, he reloaded his gun, returned on his steps, taking on his return the way he had taken in coming, and brought down the second papak in the same way, and so on successively until the last of the ten.

This proof of skill ten times repeated roused universal applause.

Ammalat Bey did not pause : his pride once let loose demanded a complete triumph. He threw his gun far from him and drew his pistols : turning in his saddle so as to gallop face to the rear, at the moment when his horse in galloping raised its two hind hoofs, he fired and unshod the right foot.

Then, recharging his pistol, he did as much with the left foot.

This extorted cries of admiration.

Then he again seized his gun and bade one of his noukers gallop in front of him.

Both started quick as thought.

In the middle of the race the nouker took a silver rouble and threw it into the air.

Ammalat Bey raised his gun to his shoulder, but

at the moment his horse made a false step and, rolling, fell, ploughing up the dust of the road with its head.

A single cry was heard ; it came simultaneously from every throat.

But the skilful rider remained upright in the stirrups, moved no more than if nothing had occurred, and as his feet touched the ground he fired his shot.

The rouble swept away by the bullet fell far beyond the group of people.

The crowd, intoxicated with joy, shouted with all its might. But Ammalat Bey, calm and impassive in appearance, quickly disentangled his feet from the stirrups, made his horse rise, and threw the bridle to a nouker to have the animal shod—immediately.

The racing and the firing continued.

At this moment, his foster-brother, Sophir Ali, son of a poor Bey of Bouinaki, approached Ammalat Bey.

He was a handsome young man, simple and mirthful. He had been brought up and had grown up with Ammalat. The same intimacy existed between them as between two brothers.

He jumped off his horse, saluted him, and said :

‘The nouker Memet Ranoul tires your old horse Antrim by trying to make it jump a ravine more than fifteen feet broad.’

‘And Antrim does not jump it,’ cried Ammalat Bey with impatience, and frowning ; ‘bring him to me instantly.’

He went before his horse, signed to the nouker to dismount, leapt into the saddle, and guided Antrim straight to the ditch to let it see it.

Then coming back, he took a clear space and put the animal at a gallop in the direction of the ravine.

As he drew near, he pressed the horse with his legs and supported him with the bridle.

But Antrim, not relying on his power, swerved to the right by a rapid change.

Ammalat Bey again measured a space and started at a gallop for the second time.

This second time Antrim, urged by the whip, poised himself on his hind quarters. But instead of completing the movement commenced, he turned on his hind feet as on a pivot, and refused a second time.

Ammalat Bey grew furious.

It was useless for Sophir Bey to implore him not to force the poor beast, who had honourably lost its strength in combat and in racing. Ammalat Bey paid no attention, and, drawing his schaska, forced it to resume its course for the third time, instigating it no longer with the whip but with the blade of the sword.

But nothing happened fresh, for this time, as twice before, the horse stopped on the brink of the ditch.

Only this time Ammalat gave poor Antrim such a blow with the butt of his schaska between the two ears, that the horse dropped like an ox hit by a poleaxe.

Ammalat Bey had killed it stark.

‘That is the reward of a faithful servant,’ said Sophir Ali, with a sigh, as he looked sadly at the dead animal.

‘No, the punishment of disobedience,’ retorted Ammalat Bey, wrathfully.

Sophir Ali held his peace; the riders continued galloping.

All at once the roll of drums was heard, and over the mountain could be seen the glittering points of the Russian bayonets coming steadily nearer.

It was a company of the Kourinsk Regiment returning from escorting a transport of wheat from Derbend.

The Captain commanding this company and another officer marched a few paces ahead of their men.

Thinking it was time to allow a little rest, he ordered his soldiers to halt.

They piled arms, placed a sentinel, and stretched themselves on the grass.

The arrival of a Russian detachment was not a novelty for the inhabitants of Bouinaki—in 1819—but even to-day such an apparition can never be very agreeable to the men of Daghestan : religion teaches them to regard the Russians as eternal enemies, and if at times they smile on them, it is to hide their real feelings under the smile—and the real feeling is an inveterate and mortal hatred.

A murmur passed through the crowd when they saw the Russians halt on their race-course ; the women returned to their homes, but not without glancing at the new-comers through the opening of their veils ; the men, on the contrary, furtively looked at them whilst gathering in a circle to speak in muttered tones.

But the more prudent old men approached the Captain and inquired after his health.

‘As for me, I am all right,’ he said, ‘but my horse has cast a shoe, so it is lame. By good luck, there’s a fine Tartar,’ he continued, pointing to the farrier who was shoeing the horse of Ammalat, ‘who will set that right.’

Then, approaching him :

‘My friend,’ said he, ‘when you have finished shoeing that horse, you can do the same to mine.’

The farrier, whose face was doubly blacked by the sun and by coal dust, cast a gloomy look on the captain, pulled his moustaches, forced his papak down on to his ears, but did not answer, and as he had finished with the horse of Ammalet Bey he calmly put his tools into his bag.

‘Ah, but did you understand?’ asked the Captain.

‘Perfectly,’ replied the farrier.

‘What did I say to you, then?’

‘That your horse had cast a shoe.’

‘Well, since you understood, get to your work.’

‘To-day—Friday—is a holiday. No work is done on a holiday,’ replied the Tartar.

‘Listen,’ said the Captain; ‘I’ll pay you what you like. But you must know one thing; what you won’t do willingly, you will be made to by force.’

‘Before any other order I ought to obey that of Allah, who forbade me to work on Friday. On ordinary days it is sinful enough, but on a day like this I would think twice about it. I do not want myself to buy the coal that will burn me in hell.’

‘What were you doing just now, then?’ asked the Captain, commencing to frown in his turn; ‘were you not working? It seems to me a horse is a horse, mine especially, which is a thorough-bred Mussulman; look if you do not recognise it as a Karabachian.’

‘It is true a horse is a horse, and there is no difference between them when they are well bred. But it is not so with men. The horse I have just shod belongs to Ammalat Bey, and Ammalat Bey is my aga.’

‘That means if you had not obeyed him he would have cut off your two ears, you rascal, but you will not work for me because you do not see that I have the right to do as much. Very well, my good fellow, I will not cut off your ears because it is forbidden to us Christians: but you may be sure you will receive two hundred lashes on your back if you do not obey me. You hear?’

‘I hear.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, as I am a good Mussulman, I reply the second time what I replied the first time. To-day is Friday, and a Mussulman does not work on Fridays.’

‘You think so?’

‘I am sure.’

‘When you have worked for the pleasure of your Tartar master, you can well work for the necessity of a Russian officer. I clearly explain to you that if my horse is not shod I cannot continue my march. Here, soldiers!’

A large ring had already formed round the two

disputants, but at this point in the quarrel the circle became at once larger and more dense, whilst among the Tartars voices were heard, saying :

‘ That is not right. That cannot be. To-day is Friday. We do not work on Friday.’

At the same time several of the farrier’s comrades began to force their papaks over their eyes, and to lay their hands on the handles of their daggers, drawing nearer to the captain, and crying to the farrier :

‘ Do not shoe the Russian’s horse, Alikper, do not touch his beast. What you did for Ammalat Bey was for a good Mussulman ; you ought not to do it for a dog of a Muscovite.’

The Captain was brave ; he also knew the Asiatics.

‘ Will you clear out, you pack of scoundrels ? ’ he shouted to them, pulling a pistol from his belt ; ‘ or if you stay, be silent, for as surely as you will all be damned, the first who says a word will find his lips closed with a seal of lead from me.’

This menace, enforced by the bayonets of several soldiers, produced its effect. The cowards fled, the valiant remained, but never said a word.

As for Alikper, perceiving that matters would go hard with him, he looked round to see if he had some means of escaping, but, finding none, he

murmured some Turkish words which were evidently excuses to the Prophet, turned up his sleeves, opened his bag, took out his hammer and pincers, and prepared to obey.

It must be stated that Ammalat Bey had seen nothing of what had occurred, for so soon as he perceived the Russians, not wishing to have any disagreeable encounter with them, he had jumped on his horse, and resumed his road to his house which, like an eagle's nest, dominated the village of Bouinaki.

But if one of the important personages of our story made his exit on one side, a personage of some importance entered at this moment on the other.

CHAPTER II.

THE rider was of small stature, but vigorously built. He appeared to belong to the easily recognised tribe of the Chesouri, as shown by his cuirass and casque of chain armour, by the small shield carried in his left hand, and by the straight blade of his schaska.

The only thing lacking in the costume of the new-comer—a costume which to this day is exactly the same as was worn in the Crusades—was the cross of red cloth worn to this day on the right side of the breast by those mountaineers who have remained true to the Catholic faith.

The others, who have turned Mussulmen, either by compulsion or by conviction, have retained the same costume, but have removed the sign of our redemption.

The rider was followed by five noukers completely armed like himself.

By the dust with which the men were covered,

by the foam which drenched their horses, it was easy to see they had made a long and rapid journey.

The first rider, to whom particular allusion has already been made, as he slowly rode by the soldiers appeared to regard them with insulting indifference, and brushed so near to the guns that he unfastened one of the piles, which fell to the ground.

But without appearing to notice the accident, he continued his journey, whilst his noukers carelessly let the hoofs of their horses trample on the guns of the Russian soldiers.

The sentinel, who from afar had shouted to the rider 'Keep off!'—an injunction which, as has been seen, did not produce much effect—sprang to the bridle of his horse, while the soldiers, considering themselves insulted by the scorn of the Mussulmen, began to grumble at them.

'Who are you?' cried the sentinel, seizing, as we have said, the bridle belonging to the chief of the little band.

'You are new to the country if you have not already recognised Achmet, Khan of Avarie,' calmly answered the rider, snatching the bridle of his horse from the sentinel; 'it seems to me that last year, near Bachkli, I left the Russians a good memorial of me.'

Then, as he had spoken in Tartar, turning to one of his noukers, he added :

‘Translate to these dogs in their own language what I have done them the honour of saying to them.’

The nouker repeated word for word, in Russian, the observations of Achmet Khan in Tartar.

‘It is Achmet Khan, it is Achmet Khan!’ repeated the soldiers in chorus; ‘arrest him, do not let him go; since we hold him, let us avenge the affair at Bachkli!’

‘Get back, you cur,’ cried Achmet Khan, striking the hand of the sentinel with his whip; ‘have you forgotten that to-day I am a Russian general?’

This time he pronounced his words in such pure Muscovite that the soldiers did not lose a syllable.

‘You mean to say a Russian traitor,’ cried several soldiers. ‘Lead him to the captain or to Derbend, to Colonel Werkowski.’

‘It is in hell only that I would go with such leaders,’ said Achmet Khan with contempt.

At the same time he made his horse rear on its hind legs, wheeled it to right and left, then stinging its croup with a violent blow of his whip, he made it bound over the sentinel, who was knocked down by the shock

The noukers put their mounts to a gallop and followed their Khan, who went about a hundred yards at this rapid rate, and then allowed his horse to resume its wonted pace, whilst calmly playing with the bridle.

Only then did the crowd of Tartars assembled round the farrier, who had begun to shoe the Captain's horse, attract his attention ; for as the Captain had not been able to see what was happening behind him, so Achmet Khan was ignorant of what was going on before him.

‘ It appears there is some disturbance here,’ said the Khan, reining up his horse. ‘ What is the matter, and what is the dispute about ? ’

‘ Ah, it is Achmet Khan,’ cried the Tartars, and saluted him respectfully.

Achmet Khan renewed his query.

He was told about the Captain and the farrier.

‘ And you look on, motionless and stupid like oxen, when your brother is maltreated, when your customs are scorned, when your religion is trampled under foot,’ cried Achmet Khan, ‘ and you murmur like old women instead of avenging yourselves. Why do you not weep ? ’

Then thrice in a tone of profound disdain he said :

‘ Cowards ! Cowards ! Cowards ! ’

‘What can we do?’ replied several voices, ‘the Russians have cannon and bayonets.’

‘And you? Have you not guns and daggers? Shame! shame on the Mussulmen. The sword of Daghestan trembles before the Russian whip.’

Their faces grew wrathful.

‘Ah, you are afraid of cannon and bayonets, but you are not afraid of dishonour. Between hell and Siberia you choose—hell. Did your ancestors act thus? Were your fathers timid like you? They did not count their enemies, but whatever the number they marched against them crying ‘Allah!’ and if they fell, they at least fell covered with glory. By any chance, are the Russians made of other metal than you? Have their cannon always shown you only their mouths? An ox is seized by the horns, you curs. Scorpions are seized by the tails, you cowards.’

And, as before, he again repeated three times :

‘Cowards! Cowards! Cowards!’

This time the taunt hit the Tartars full in the face.

‘He is right,’ they cried ; ‘Achmet Khan is right. We are too valiant to permit the Russians to do all this. Let us rescue the farrier, let us release Alikper.’

And they began to collect together, more

menacing than ever, round the soldiers, in the midst of whom, the farrier was shoeing the horse of the Captain.

The revolt grew.

Satisfied at having brought matters to this pitch and not wishing to compromise himself in so trivial an affair, Achmet Khan left two of his noukers to animate the Tartars, and followed by the three others he took the short cut over the mountain which led to the house of Ammalat Bey. The host had already reached home and was smoking his kalia, lying on a couch.

On seeing Achmet Khan appear on his threshold, he rose and advanced to meet him.

‘May you be victorious!’ said Achmet Khan to Ammalat Bey on seeing the young man approach.

This phrase of Tcherkarian greeting was pronounced with so significative an accent that Ammalat Bey, after embracing Achmet Khan, asked him :

‘Is this a jest or a prediction which you have just addressed to me, my dear guest?’

‘That depends on you, and will be as it suits you. The heir of the principality of Tarkowski has only to draw his sword——’

‘Never to put it into its sheath, Khan.’

Then, shaking his head :

‘It would be an ugly affair for me,’ he continued ;

and it is better to be a peaceful and uncontested landowner of Bouinaki, than to hide myself in the mountain like an outlaw.'

'Or like a lion, Ammalat. The lion also lives on the mountain in order to enjoy freedom.'

The young man heaved a sigh.

'It is much better not to awake. I sleep, Achmet; do not awake me.'

'The Russians give you opium to make you sleep, and during your slumbers another gathers the golden fruit of your garden.'

'What can I do with my scanty strength?'

'Strength is in the soul, Ammalat; only dare and all will bow before you.'

Then, coming closer:

'Listen,' said he, 'another voice besides mine cries to you to awake. It is the voice of victory.'

And actually the noise of a sharp fusillade reached the two princes.

In a moment, Sophir Ali entered the room with pale and distorted face.

'Do you hear, Chamkal,' said he, 'Bouinaki is revolting! The mob surrounds the Russian company and the Tartars fire on the soldiers.'

'Oh, the rascals,' cried Ammalat Bey, seizing his gun, 'have they dared do anything without me?'

Run ahead, Sophir Ali, bid them in my name remain quiet, and kill the first man who disobeys you.'

'I wished to pacify them,' answered Sophir Ali, 'but they will listen to nothing. The noukers of Achmet Khan are with them and excite them by crying "Kill the Russians!"'

'My noukers! Have they really said that?' asked Achmet Khan with a smile.

'Not only have they shouted it, but they have set the example by being the first to fire,' said Sophir Ali.

'In that case they are fine fellows who understand the hints given to them,' replied Achmet Khan.

'What have you done, Achmet Khan?' cried Ammalat Bey in sorrowful tones.

'What you ought to have long ago done, Ammalat.'

'How shall I now answer the Russians?' asked the young prince.

'With bullet and kanjiar. Fate works for you. Come, happy rebels. Let our schaskas whistle in the wind and let us fall on the Russians.'

'They are here,' cried the Captain in a voice of thunder, as he burst into the room accompanied by two men, who alone could keep up with him in climbing the side of the mountain which led to the house of Ammalat.

Then, turning to his two men :

‘Keep the door, there, and let no one leave.’

The two soldiers obeyed.

Disturbed by this unexpected revolt, in which he might easily be implicated, although he had not taken the slightest part, Ammalat advanced towards the Captain, and in a friendly voice which was in sharp contrast to the angry tones of the other :

‘Do you bring joy into my house, brother?’ he asked in Tartar.

‘I do not know what I bring into your house, Ammalat,’ said the Captain, ‘but I know how I am received in your village. I am received as an enemy and your men have fired on the soldiers of my—of your—of our common Emperor.’

‘They have done wrong to fire on the Russians,’ said Achmet Khan, as he carelessly reclined on the cushions of the divan, and puffed from the kalia which Ammalat Bey abandoned ; ‘they were in error—if each shot they fired did not kill a man.’

‘There ! Behold the author of all the mischief, Ammalat,’ said the Captain, designating Achmet Khan with an angry gesture. ‘Without him all would be quiet in Bouinaki. Really you are charming, Ammalat Bey. You call yourself the friend of the Russians and you receive their enemy like a guest,

you hide him like an accomplice. Ammalat Bey, in the name of the Emperor I demand that you surrender this man to me.'

'Captain,' replied Ammalat, in a voice which was firm though gentle, 'you know that with us a guest is sacred. It would be a crime to yield my guest to you. Do not exact it, respect our custom, and if necessary respect my petition.'

'In my turn, Ammalat, I tell you—duty before custom. Hospitality is sacred, but an oath is more sacred still. Your oath pledges you not to shield from justice even your own brother if he is a criminal.'

'I would sooner give up my own brother than my guest, Captain. Besides, it is not your business to point out to me the line of conduct I have to follow. If I sin, Allah and the Padishah will judge me. Let the Prophet guard the Khan on the plain or on the mountain, once I have no more to do with him. But here, under my roof, I must defend him and,' added the young prince in a resolute tone, 'I will defend him!'

'Then you will be answerable for a traitor?' demanded the Captain.

Achmet Khan had taken no part in the dispute, peacefully smoking his *kalian*, as though the discussion was about some other man. But at the

word traitor he bounded to his feet rather than rose, and approaching the Captain :

‘You say I am a traitor,’ he hissed ; ‘you had better say that I had wished to become a traitor to those I ought to have remained faithful to. The Russian Padishah gave me a brevet, and I was grateful to him so long as he did not exact the impossible from me. I was desired to lead the Russian troops into Avarie : to permit the building of forts. What would you then have called me, if I had sold the blood and liberty of those Allah set me over as chief and father? But even had I wished it I could not have succeeded. Thousands of daggers would have pierced my heart. The rocks would have been loosened in the caves and of themselves would have fallen on my head. I was estranged from the friendship of the Russians, but I was not yet their enemy. What prize have I received for my patience? I have been offended by the letter of one of your generals. This offence cost him dear in the Bachkli. For those few words I have poured out a river of blood, and that river of blood for ever separates me from you.’

‘Well, this blood calls for vengeance,’ cried the Captain, ‘and you shall not escape this vengeance, you cur.’

And he made a gesture to seize Achmet Khan by the throat.

But before his hand could touch the mountain chieftain, the kanjiar of the latter had entirely disappeared into his intestines.

The Captain, without uttering a word or heaving a sigh, fell dead on the carpet.

Then, drawing the pistol from his own belt with the same rapidity, and snatching that of Ammalat Bey from his, with two shots, quick as lightning, deadly as thunderbolts, he stretched the two Russians guarding the door dead at his feet.

Ammalat Bey had seen him do so without having time to oppose this triple murder.

‘You have ruined me, Achmet,’ he said sadly to him; ‘this man was a Russian, he was my guest.’

‘There are insults no roof can shelter, Chamkal,’ said the Khan. ‘But this is not the hour for discussion; shut the door, summon your men: let us march against our enemies.’

‘An hour ago they were not my enemies,’ said Ammalat Bey, ‘and now how can you propose I should march against them? I have neither powder nor bullets, and my men are dispersed.’

‘The Russians! The Russians!’ cried Sophir

Ali as he entered--and turned pale with terror at the sight of the three corpses.

‘Come with me, Ammalat,’ said Achmet Khan. ‘I was going to Tchetchina to rouse it against the Line. God only knows what will happen. But on the mountains there are bread and water, powder and bullets, as well as all that is needed by a mountaineer. What do you say?’

‘Let us start, then,’ answered Ammalat resolutely, ‘since there is no course open to me except flight; you are right. This is not the hour for recriminations and reproaches. My horse and six noukers with me, Sophir Ali.’

‘And I also, I also; may I not come too?’ pleaded the young man, with tears in his eyes.

‘No, my dear Sophir Ali, you will remain here to see that this house is not pillaged. Salute my wife from me and conduct her to her father. Do not forget me. Farewell.’

As Achmet Khan and Ammalat Bey issued from one door, the Russians entered by the other.

CHAPTER III.

THE hot sun of a spring noonday beat down on the Caucasus.

The cries of the Mollahs called the inhabitants of Tchetchina to prayer, and their monotonous accents, after awaking the rocks for a moment, died gradually away in the still air.

Mollah Hadji Soleiman, a pious Turk, sent by the Divan of Stamboul to the mountains to strengthen the faith of the mountaineers, and at the same time to encourage them to revolt against the Russians, was resting on the roof of the mosque after his prayers and ablutions. It was only a short time since he had been chosen Mollah of the village of Tchetchin-tgalij, and it was no doubt for this reason that he was so seriously contemplating his beard and so solemnly watching the rings of smoke which rose in the air from his chibouque. He gazed with satisfaction at the dark apertures of two or three

caves cleft in the rock just opposite. On his left he saw the ridge which separates Tchetchina from Avarie, and farther off the snowy ridge of the Caucasus. The huts, scattered over the mountain, descended in groups half way down the side, where they ceased, forming a fortress which could only be approached by narrow paths and which, created by Nature, served as an ark of refuge for the mountaineer.

All seemed tranquil in the village and on the neighbouring mountains. Not a human being was to be seen either on the roads or in the streets. The flocks of sheep had sought the shade of the ravines. The oxen had collected in a narrow and muddy stream, and lying in the mire only showed their heads above the water. The gentle buzzing of the insects and the monotonous chirrup of the cricket were the only signs of animation afforded by Nature amid the gloomy stillness of the mountains, and Hadji Soleiman, lying under the cupola, admired with that calm which only belongs to dreamers, the passive splendour of Nature, so closely in harmony with Mahometan indolence. He hardly blinked his eyes in the vacancy of which the fire and light of the sun seemed extinguished, when through this apparent vacuity he saw two riders climbing at a walking pace the

mountain opposite to that on which the caves were excavated.

‘Nephtali!’ called the Mollah, turning towards the hut nearest the mosque, and at the door of which was a saddled horse.

At the summons, a handsome Circassian with a beard, which was short though unshaven, and with a papak on his head which concealed half his face, appeared in the street.

‘I see two horsemen,’ continued the Mollah; ‘they are passing outside the village.’

‘They are Jews or Armenians,’ replied Nephtali. ‘They would not take a guide from economy, and they will break their necks on the path they have selected, for only the wild goats and the finest horsemen of Tchetchina can travel by that road.’

‘No, brother Nephtali,’ said the Mollah. ‘I have made two journeys to Mecca and I know Jews and Armenians well. These riders do not belong to either nationality. If they were Jews or Armenians they would come for trading purposes and would have baggage. But look for yourself: your eyes are young and consequently safer than mine. Formerly, at the distance of a verst,’ continued the Mollah with a sigh, ‘I could count the buttons on the uniform of a Russian soldier, and the bullet I sent after an

infidel never missed its aim. To-day, at the same distance, I can hardly distinguish an ox from a horse.'

And he heaved another sigh.

Whilst he was talking, more to himself than to his companion, the latter had rapidly ascended to him and was looking at the travellers, who continued to approach.

'The day is hot and the journey is fatiguing,' said the Mollah; 'invite these two travellers to refresh themselves and to rest their horses. Perhaps they bring some tidings. The Koran bids us welcome all who are travelling.'

'Before even the Koran had penetrated to our mountains,' replied Nephtali, 'a traveller never quitted the village before he had rested and been refreshed, never took leave of us without blessing us, and never left without a guide for the remainder of his journey. Only I have my suspicions of these two travellers. Why do they avoid honest folk, and instead of passing by the aoul, risk their lives by riding on the slope?'

'In any case, it seems to me they are fellow-countrymen,' said Hadji Soleiman, putting his hand to his eyes to shade them from the rays of the sun. 'They wear the Tchetchen garb. Perhaps they are

returning from the expedition on which your father started with a hundred of our men. Or perhaps they are two brothers united for vengeance, and are going to avenge blood with blood.'

'No, Soleiman,' said the young man, shaking his head, 'these two men do not belong to us. No mountaineer would come here expressly to boast of a fight with the Russians, and to show his weapons. Neither are they Abreks.¹ Abreks in the midst of their most desperate foes would not pull their bacheliks² over their faces. Garments are sometimes deceptive, Hadji Soleiman. Who knows that they are not Russian deserters? It is not long ago that a Cossack escaped from the aoul of Goumbel, after having killed the master of the house in which he lived, and stolen his horse and his weapons. The devil is very cunning, and the strongest often succumb to temptation.'

'No one can be strong whose faith is weak, Nephtali. But stay, I see locks of hair beneath the papak of the second rider.'

'May I be ground to powder if that is not true!' cried Nephtali. 'He is either a Russian, or what is

¹ Abreks are mountaineers who have taken an oath to go in search of danger and consequently take no precautions to avoid it.

² Hoods.

worse, a Tartar Chaquide.¹ Wait. Wait. I will curl your locks of hair. I will return in half an hour, Soleiman. In half an hour either they will be our guests or one or other of us will be acquainted with the depth of the precipice.'

Nephtali ran quickly down the steps, seized his gun, jumped on his horse, and started at a gallop to the mountain, heeding neither ravines nor rocks. Only from a distance could be seen the stones flying like dust from under the feet of the intrepid horseman.

'Allah, Akbar,' said the Hadji proudly, as he relighted his chibouque which had gone out.

Nephtali soon joined the two riders. Their tired horses, covered with foam, soaked with their sweat the narrow path by which they were ascending the mountain. The one who went first wore a coat of mail of Chepour, the other was in the Tcherken attire. Only, in sharp contrast to this dress, instead of a schaska, a Persian sword was suspended from the rich belt which encircled his waist.

Nephtali could not see their faces, over which their bacheliks were pulled, either from desire to protect themselves from the sun, or in order to avoid recognition.

¹ Musselmen are divided into two hostile sects, the Sunnites and the Chaquides; Nephtali and Soleiman are Sunnites.

He proceeded for a long time behind them along this narrow track which overhung the precipice. But when the road became a little wider, he outstripped them and barred their passage.

‘Salaam,’ he said, at the same time placing his loaded gun across his saddle.

The foremost lifted his bachelik, but only sufficiently to see without being seen.

‘Salaam,’ he replied, unfastening his gun in his turn and rising in his stirrups.

‘May God protect you on your journey!’ continued Nephtali, preparing to kill the traveller, whom he was commending to the protection of God, at the first hostile movement he should perceive.

‘And you,’ replied the unknown in the coat of mail, ‘may God grant you intelligence not to plant yourself in the path of travellers! What do you want, kumack?’¹

‘I offer you repose and refreshment for yourselves and a stable for your horses. There is always room in my house for hospitality. The benediction of travellers will increase my flocks. Do not let the reproach fall on our village that it is one which is passed without halting.’

¹ Friend.

‘Our thanks, brother. We do not come on to the mountain to pay visits—we are in a hurry.’

‘Take care,’ replied Nephtali, ‘you are going into danger without a guide.’

‘A guide,’ said the traveller laughing. ‘A guide in the Caucasus. Why, I know the mountain better than any of you. I have been where the jaguars do not go, where the snakes do not crawl—where only the eagles go. Make way for us, comrade, your house is not my road. I have no time to waste in chattering with you.’

‘I shall not yield one step,’ replied the young man, ‘until I know your name.’

‘Thank Heaven, Nephtali, that I know your father, and have often marched to battle at his side. But make room, or, in spite of the friendship I bear him, your mother will weep to-morrow at seeing strips of the flesh of her son in the teeth of the jackals and in the beaks of the eagles. Unworthy son! You ride along the roads seeking quarrels with travellers when the bones of your father are whitening on the Russian plain and the Cossack women are selling his weapons. Nephtali, your father was yesterday killed on the other side of the Terek. Now, since you wish to know me, recognise me.’

‘Sultan Achmet Khan!’ cried the young

Tchetchen, agitated both by the news he had just learnt and by the severe look of the traveller.

‘Yes, I am Achmet Khan,’ replied the prince, ‘but remember, Nephtali, if you tell anyone you have seen the Khan of Avarie, my vengeance will pursue your descendants to the third generation.’

The young man respectfully made way and the two travellers passed close to him.

Achmet Khan again relapsed into the silence from which the apparition of the young man had aroused him. His mind was filled with gloomy memories. Ammalat Bey—for it was he—like him was dreaming and dumb. Their clothes bore traces of the recent fight. Their moustaches were burnt with powder, and drops of blood had dried on their faces. But the haughty air of the former seemed to bid defiance to all Nature. A contemptuous smile hovered on his lips.

As for Ammalat Bey, his features only betrayed fatigue. He hardly glanced around him. Only, from time to time, he allowed a sigh to escape him, extorted by the pain of his wounded hand.

The gait of his horse, unused to mountains, also caused him as much impatience as inconvenience.

He was the first to break the silence.

‘Why did you refuse the invitation of that brave

youth?' he asked the Khan of Avarie. 'We might have rested there for an hour or two.'

'You think and you talk like a child, my dear Ammalat,' replied the Khan. 'You are accustomed to govern Tartars and to command them like slaves. You imagine you can treat mountaineers in the same way. The hand of fate is on us. We are beaten and pursued. More than a hundred mountaineers, your noukers and mine, have fallen beneath the Russian bullets. Do you wish us to show ourselves defeated to the Tchetchens? They are accustomed to look upon the face of Achmet Khan as the star of victory. If I appear before them as an exile, if I confess to them my own shame, if I receive the hospitality granted to a beggar and hear myself reproached for the death of husbands and sons drawn by me into this battle, I should lose all their confidence. In time the tears will dry. Then Achmet Khan will reappear before them, a prophet of pillage and of blood, and once more I will lead them to battle on the Russian frontier. If I appear to-day before the despairing Tchetchens they would not remember that it is Allah who alone gives and takes victory away. They might offend me with an imprudent word, and I have never forgiven an offence. So some miserable personal vengeance might be placed across the broad road

I will some day make in the ranks of the Russians. Why quarrel needlessly with a brave people? Why shatter the idol of glory which they are accustomed to regard with awe? If I lower myself to the rank of an ordinary man, everyone will come to measure his shoulder with mine. And you, who have need of a doctor, will find no better physician than in my home. To-morrow we shall be there, take courage till then.'

Ammalat Bey gratefully put his hand on his heart and on his forehead. He recognised the wisdom of the words of the Khan, but he was growing weak from loss of blood.

Still continuing to avoid the villages, they spent the night among the rocks, eating a little rice and honey, provisions without which a mountaineer never undertakes a journey, no matter how short. They crossed the Koisson by the bridge thrown across it near Saherte. They left behind them Ande, Boulim, and the ridge of Satatour. Their road passed by forests and precipices which appalled their eyes and their souls. At last they began to climb the ridge which separated them from the north of Khurzuk, the capital of the Khans. To arrive at the summit of this ridge, the travellers were obliged to follow diagonal lines, endlessly retracing their steps, but at

each step getting a little higher. The Khan's horse, bred on the mountains and accustomed to the steep paths, proceeded with caution, but the proud young racehorse of Ammalat Bey stumbled and fell at each step. Petted and spoilt by its master, it could not endure such a ride in the mountains; under the sun, in the midst of snow, it could hardly breathe, and with the supreme effort the dilated nostrils seemed to exhale fire, while the sweat ran from its soft body.

'Allah Berekeh,'¹ cried Ammalat Bey as he reached the culminating point of the mountain, from which his gaze could embrace the whole of Avarie.

But, at that very moment, his horse collapsed: blood gushed from its mouth, and this final sigh broke the girth.

The Khan assisted Ammalat Bey out of the stirrups, but he saw with distress that in the fall the handkerchief of the young prince had become loosened from his wound and that the blood, which they had taken so much trouble to staunch, was again flowing.

But this time Ammalat Bey felt no pain: he was weeping for his horse.

A drop suffices to make a brimming bowl overflow.

¹ God be praised.

‘ You will never carry me again like a feather on the wind, my good steed,’ he said to it ; ‘ nor in the cloud of dust raised by a race, as I heard the cries of those I left far behind ; nor amid the shout of the warriors in the fire and smoke of the battle. On you I acquired the reputation of a rider : why, then, am I doomed to survive my glory and you ? ’

He bent his head between his knees and remained silent, whilst the Khan bound up his wound ; at length, perceiving the care his companion bestowed on him :

‘ Leave me, Achmet Khan,’ he said suddenly, ‘ leave an unhappy man to his fate. The journey is still long and I am dying. By staying with me you will only perish, and that uselessly. Look at that eagle circling above us : he understands that it will soon hold my head between its claws, and God be thanked for it. Far better to have one’s tomb in the breast of a noble bird than to be trodden under foot by Christians. Farewell. Leave me.’

‘ Are you not ashamed, Ammalat Bey, of falling thus in breaking a straw ? What is your wound ? What is a dead horse ? Your wound will be cured in a week. As for your horse, we will find you a better. Misfortune comes from Allah, but happiness also comes from him. It is a sin to despair in

youth. Mount my horse. I will lead it by the bridle and before night we shall be at home. Come! Every minute is precious. Come! Time is of value.'

'Time no longer exists for me, Achmet Khan,' replied the young man. 'I thank you for your brotherly sympathy, but I shall not abuse it. We have still too far to go, and we could not walk so long a while. Leave me to my fate on these heights, which bring me near to Heaven. I shall die free and happy. My father is dead. I have married a woman I do not love. My uncle and my father-in-law are at the feet of the Russians. An exile from home, a fugitive from battle, I should not, I do not wish to live.'

'It is the fever which speaks, not you, Ammalat Bey. Your words proceed from delirium. Are we not destined to survive our parents? As for your wife, if you do not love her, does not our holy religion give you the right to take three others? That you should detest the Chamkal I comprehend. But you should love his heritage, which will one day make you free and a prince. Now, a dead man has no need of wealth or power. A dead man cannot avenge himself, and you must avenge yourself on the Russians. Come to your senses, if only for that.

We are beaten. Are we the first to sustain a reverse ? To-day the Russians are conquerors. To-morrow it will be us. Allah gives happiness, but man himself makes his own fame. You are weak and wounded, but I am strong and unwounded. You droop from fatigue, whilst I am as fresh and as active as the man who has not yet crossed the threshold of his door, and who has just put on his sandals and girded his loins. Mount on my horse, Ammalat, and as sure as that eagle was not there to eat your heart, for it is disappearing in the distance, we will make the Russians pay dearly for our defeat of yesterday.'

The countenance of Ammalat Bey regained animation.

'Well then, yes,' said he, 'you are right. I will live for revenge, for a revenge covert or open—but dark, fierce, and to the death. Believe me, Achmet Khan, it is for revenge that I again embrace life. Henceforth I am yours. By the tomb of my father I belong to you. Guide my steps, direct my blows, and if ever I forget my oath recall this moment to my memory ; my dead horse, my bleeding hand, and the eagle that hovered over my head. If sought, I will awake and my dagger shall be the thunderbolt.'

Achmet Khan embraced the young man, lifted

him like a child in his arms, and placed him on his own saddle.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘I recognise in you the pure blood of the Emirs, that blood which flows in our veins like saltpetre, and when it inflames makes the very mountains fall. Come, Ammalat Bey, and all that has been promised to you by me shall be kept by Mahomet.’

And, supporting the wounded man, Achmet Khan began to descend the mountains. Stones rolled under their feet, more than once the horse fell, but at last they came down safe and sound to the place where vegetation recommenced. Soon after they entered a forest composed of several kinds of trees. The richness of the vegetation and the quiet peace of the perpetual twilight which reigned under this vault of verdure, impenetrable to the rays of the sun, inspired in man respect for the savage independence of Nature.

Frequently the path was lost between the trees, and frequently was steeply cut on the edge of a rock, in the depths of which babbled and glittered a stream. Pheasants with glowing throats passed from one clump to another. All breathed that revivifying freshness of the evening unknown to inhabitants of the plain. Our travellers were almost at the village

of Akhak, which is only separated from Khurzuk by a small hill, when they heard a shot.

They stopped with anxiety.

Then all at once :

‘It is my huntsmen,’ said Achmet Khan ; ‘they do not expect me at this hour, and above all do not expect me in such a plight. I bring to Khurzuk much joy and many tears.’

Achmet Khan bent his head and heaved a sigh. His brow grew dark.

Gentle and bitter feelings rapidly chase one another through the heart of an Asiatic.

A second shot was heard, then a third, and after that shots without interruption followed the reports.

‘The Russians are at Khurzuk,’ cried Ammalat.

He drew his sword and gripped his horse between his knees as if at a single leap he would cover the distance which separated him from them.

But the effort was too much for him ; his sword slipped from his mutilated hand and fell to the ground.

He employed his final strength to dismount from his horse.

‘Achmet Khan,’ said he, ‘hasten to the rescue

of your fellow-countrymen. Your presence will be more valuable than that of a hundred riders.'

But Achmet Khan did not remount. He listened to the whistling of the bullets as though he wished to distinguish those of the Russians from those of his own warriors.

'From which direction have they come down?' he cried. 'Have they feet of chamois? Have they wings of eagles? Farewell, Ammalat! I am going to die on the ruins of my fortress.'

But at this moment a bullet fell at his feet.

He picked it up, and with a smile:

'Remount my horse, Ammalat,' he said to him quietly; 'you will soon know what this means. The Russian bullets are made of lead—these are copper.'

Then, looking at the bullet:

'This kindly fellow-countryman,' he said, 'has come where the Russians cannot come from—the south.'

They continued to climb the hill which separated them from Khurzuk. Arrived on the summit, they surveyed a veritable battlefield, beyond which stretched the aoul of Khurzuk, dominated by the two towers of the castle of Achmet Khan.

A hundred men divided into two parties, ambuscaded in the houses, advanced or retired behind the masses of rock, firing on each other ; whilst women, without veils, with children in their arms and hair in disorder, ran among the combatants they were inciting.

Ammalat Bey regarded this spectacle with astonishment, and then he interrogated the Khan.

‘What would you have?’ said that individual, shrugging his shoulders ; ‘it is the custom with us. In the plain, if a man has a grudge against another he stabs him with a dagger and it is all over ; in the mountains the quarrel of one is the affair of all. What is the cause of this disturbance ? Perhaps some trifle—a stolen cow. Among us it is not shameful to steal. It is only shameful to allow oneself to be caught. Admire the bravery of these women, Ammalat,’ said the Khan, growing heated and inhaling the powder with dilated nostrils ; ‘the bullets whistle in their ears, death flaps its wings over their heads, and they only mock at it. Oh ! these are the mothers and wives of brave men ! It would be really vexatious if any misfortune happened to them. I have arrived in time to stop this game.’

And, taking his gun, he advanced onto the

extreme crest of the mountain and discharged it into the air.

At this report, coming from a quarter in which it was not expected, the combatants turned round astonished.

Then with his left hand Achmet Khan lowered his bachelik.

A great shout went up from both sides, for the combatants had recognised him.

‘Keep your powder and your bullets for the Russians, inhabitants of Khurzuk,’ he shouted to them. ‘Not another shot. To-morrow I will judge your dispute and will render reason to him who has reason, blame to him who is wrong.’

But there was no need for the order of the Khan to cause the cessation of the combat. The joy of again seeing him was so great that their feuds seemed forgotten. Men and women rushed towards him, shouting ‘Long live Achmet Khan!’

‘It is well, it is well, my children,’ said Achmet Khan to them. ‘To-morrow I will descend to the square and talk with the elders. But I bring back a wounded friend, who has need of prompt succour. Do not delay that succour, which he can only find in my house.’

And indeed Ammalat Bey no longer saw what

was happening, except through a mist; he had dropped the bridle in order to hold himself on his horse.

In a moment a stretcher was made with guns still black with powder, still warm from the fight. Friends and foes ran together to spread their bourkas on it. The wounded man was laid on them. Achmet Khan remounted his horse, as was suitable for a prince returning to his own fortress.

Ammalat Bey was laid on the rich carpets of the Khan. He had entirely lost consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

THE wounded man did not regain consciousness until the following day.

His thoughts at first came back to his brain like phantoms floating in the mist.

He remembered nothing, he felt no pain.

This situation was more pleasant than painful to him : it was like a trance, which by depriving him of the sense of feeling also removed all the bitterness of life.

He could have heard with equal indifference the voice proclaiming life or death for him. He had neither the strength nor the wish to pronounce a word. If his existence had depended on a movement of his finger, he would not have taken the trouble to move it.

This state of affairs did not, however, last long.

At noon, after the visit of the physician, when all the servants were at prayers and the Khan himself

had gone down to the square as he had promised on the previous day, Ammalat Bey, left alone, thought he heard light and timid footsteps on the carpet in the room next to his own.

He made an effort, tried to turn, and doubtless succeeded, for he seemed to see—he was too weak to distinguish a vision from reality—for he seemed to see, as we were saying, the curtain over his door lifted and a young girl with black eyes, wearing a dress of yellow silk fastened at the waist by a red arkabouk, ornamented with enamelled buttons, and with long tresses falling over her shoulders, quietly approach his bed and bend over him with such sweet and tender solicitude, to look at his wounded hand, that Ammalat Bey, at the breath of her lips, at the contact with her garments, felt a passionate tremor pass through his frame. She poured the contents of a phial into a small silver cup, placed her arm under his head, lifted him up, and——

Ammalat felt nothing more, saw nothing more : his heavy eyelids closed once more, all his senses seemed intensified into one.

He listened.

He listened, and the rustling of the girl's dress seemed like the beating of an angel's wings.

Only the angel flew away.

All again became quiet, and when the wounded man was able to open his eyes once more he was alone, and he found it impossible to place any faith in his own thoughts. The fragments of his reason floated like clouds in space, losing themselves in the delusions of the fever ; so the moment he was able to utter a word he said to himself :

‘ It was a dream.’

He was deceiving himself.

The girl he believed to be a creation of his delirium was a child of sixteen, the daughter of Achmet Khan.

Among these mountaineers, even among the Mussulmen, girls enjoy a freedom with men infinitely greater than that of married women, though the Mahometan law prescribes exactly the contrary.

But the daughter of Achmet Khan enjoyed a freedom all the greater because it was only near her that her father rested after his fatigues, only with her that he unbent so far as to smile. The safety of the criminal was assured when the young princess assisted at the judgment. The axe already raised was stayed in the air. To her everything was permitted, everything was possible. Achmet Khan could refuse her nothing, and no suspicion ever occurred to him that his pure child could do anything unworthy of

her position or her duty. Besides, who could inspire those tender feelings which alone lead a girl to do wrong? Until now her father had never received a guest who was his equal in birth: and she had never troubled herself about the rank or age of the guests of her father. No doubt that was due to her youth, for she had scarcely emerged from childhood. But since the previous day she had felt the beatings of her heart. As she threw herself on her father's breast on the previous evening, she saw a handsome young man swoon, almost dead, at her feet. Her first feeling was fear, and she had turned her eyes away from the wounded man. But when her father had told her how Ammalat Bey had become his guest, she cast a look of sweet sympathy on the young man. Then, when the doctor had declared that this alarming weakness proceeded solely from loss of blood and not from the danger of the wound, a tender compassion filled the heart of the girl. Might not the doctor be mistaken? That wound so large, so alarming: was it not more dangerous than he believed? She went to bed with this fear. All night, in her dreams, she saw the handsome young man covered with blood. More than once she opened her eyes in the dark, thinking she heard him groan, and, for the first time, when she rose, the morning found

her less fresh than the dawn. For the first time she had recourse to deceit to accomplish her desire. Her father was in the chamber of the wounded man. She chose that moment to bid her parent 'good-morning.' But Ammalat's eyes were shut, so she could not see them. At noon she returned. Ammalat was alone. But the enchanting eyes of the young prince closed on seeing her. This made the poor child despair. He ought to have such lovely eyes. Never in her childish days had she so longed for a toy. Never in her youth had she so coveted a rich gem. She would have given two diamonds as large as her own eyes for his open eyes, which she fancied must be much more full of fire than any two diamonds.

Finally, she returned in the evening.

In the evening, for the first time, she met the feeble but expressive and clear gaze of Ammalat Bey, and when she had met it she could never forget his look. She understood quite well that these eyes said to her: 'Do not leave me, star of my soul. Do you not see that you alone give me light, and that if you disappear everything will again turn into night for me?' She could not understand what had happened to herself, but it was impossible for her to say whether she were still on earth or already in heaven. What she was now feeling she had never felt before. The blood

rushed so quickly to her heart that it seemed to her she would suffocate. The blood left her heart so quickly that it seemed to her she was dying.

She had seen his eyes, and it so happened that they were the most beautiful eyes in the world.

It still remained for her to hear his voice.

But Ammalat Bey remained dumb, entirely absorbed in contemplating her. He had no intention of talking. What could he say which his eyes would not express as well as his voice?

The desires of a young girl beget one another. With such beautiful eyes must also go a soft voice. What a misfortune not to hear that voice?

Then an idea occurred to her: it was that if the wounded man did not speak at all, doubtless it was because he was too weak to speak; if he were too weak to speak his wound was dangerous, more dangerous than the doctor said.

Assuredly she could not leave him with such a fear, so she decided to be the first to speak to him. What could be more simple than to inquire after his health?

One would have to be a Tartar to look upon it as insulting to speak a word to a woman, to have never seen anything except a veil—through this veil two eyebrows, and by chance the eyes which those eye-

brows surmount—to have any idea of the tremor which passed through the veins of the wounded man, already inflamed by her eyes, when the girl's voice knocked straight at his heart.

Yet the words of Seltanetta were very simple :

‘How are you?’ she had asked.

‘Oh, well—quite well,’ answered Ammalat Bey, trying to raise himself on his elbow—‘so well, that I am ready to die.’

‘May Allah preserve you!’ cried the frightened girl. ‘You ought to live yet a long time. Would you not regret life?’

‘In sweet moments, death is sweet, Seltanetta, and if I live a hundred years I should never find a better moment than this.’

Seltanetta did not understand the words of her guest, but she understood the expression of his gaze, she understood the accents of his voice, and a blush suffused her face as she made him a sign to remain quiet, and escaped to her room.

Among the mountaineers there are certainly clever doctors, especially skilled in curing wounds. They have unknown recipes for closing sores, which seem mysterious revelations of Nature. But the remedy which acted most efficaciously on Ammalat Bey was the presence of the charming Seltanetta. In the

evening he fell asleep with the sweet hope that she would appear to him in his dreams. In the morning he awoke with the certainty of seeing her in reality. His strength rapidly returned, and with his strength grew the unknown emotion he had felt from the first day he had seen the daughter of Achmet Khan, who had taken such complete possession of his heart that she could never again leave it.

Ammalat Bey, as we have already said, was married. But the marriage had been arranged as all marriages are arranged in the East. Until the day of his wedding he had never seen his betrothed, and when he did see her he found her ugly: so all the feelings of youth and love in his heart remained there unroused. This was succeeded by political disputes with his uncle and father-in-law. Tenderness, which with Orientals is only associated with sensuality, was little by little extinguished in his heart. So that on beholding Seltanetta his eyes did not even require to ask his heart for the sacrifice of the remains of a former love. The young man had been a husband, but his heart had remained virgin. Ardent by nature, independent by custom, Ammalat Bey abandoned himself entirely to the feelings he experienced. To be with her was to him supreme happiness, and to await her arrival was his occupation

for the time when she was absent. He trembled at the sound of her step and shook when he recognised her voice. Each note passed through his soul like an enchantment and like a ray of light. What he felt seemed like pain, but it was such sweet pain, an ache so full of charm, that without this pain he felt he would die.

Doubtless these two young folk, not knowing what they experienced, gave to this unknown sentiment the name of friendship. But left with complete liberty, they were often together. Achmet Khan made frequent expeditions to Avarie and left his guest with his daughter. He alone perhaps had observed their love, but this love fulfilled all his desires. As he had said to Ammalat Bey, the first marriage is nothing to a Mussulman who has the right to espouse four women. Besides, he was aware of the scanty affection which existed between the husband and wife. To become the father-in-law of Ammalat Bey, that is to say, of the heir of the Chamkal of Tarkowski, of a man who could be of such assistance to him in his war with the Russians, was more than a wish—it was an ambition.

As for these two, they made no calculations, we may be sure; since they had no desires, they lived happily, asking for nothing more, having no idea

that this bliss could ever end. The days slipped by without their knowing how, occupied in looking at the mountains through the windows, at the flocks on the summits, at the rivers at the base. If Seltanetta was embroidering a saddle for her father, Ammalat Bey lay on the cushions beside her, relating his adventures as a young man, or more frequently without saying a word, keeping his eyes fixed on hers. He did not remember the past, he did not think of the future : he only felt that he was happy, and without taking the cup from his lips he drank drop by drop of the greatest happiness which comes to a man on earth :

To love and to be loved.

So passed the summer.

One morning one of the shepherds of the Khan arrived at daybreak in a state of terror. A tiger had emerged from the forest, had approached the flock crouching like a cat, and pouncing on a sheep had carried it off.

The shepherd related it all in the courtyard, with the noukers grouped around him.

‘Now,’ said the Khan, ‘is there anyone who will kill the tiger? If so, he can take my best and my finest gun, and if the tiger is destroyed the weapon shall be his.’

One of the noukers of the Khan, an excellent marksman, chose the gun he thought would suit him best among all those belonging to the Khan, and said :

‘ I will go.’

The Khan returned to his house and related what had occurred to Ammalat and to Seltanetta. But the two young people were so occupied with their love that neither of them appeared to hear what Achmet Khan had said.

On the morrow, the nouker was awaited in vain.

A little herd-boy came this time.

The child related how the nouker, on reaching the mountain towards evening, had recognised the track of the tiger. Before dawn on the next day he concealed himself on the road which the tiger had taken when it came from the wood to seize the sheep.

But the tiger did not come out : only its roaring had been heard about a verst off in the forest. No doubt in one day it had not devoured a whole sheep, and still had sufficient for its morning meal.

Perceiving that the tiger was not coming, the nouker resolved to go in search of it. He had only entered the forest a quarter of an hour, when the

boy heard a shot, then a roar, and then all was over.

He had waited an hour, and then, not seeing the man emerge from the wood, he came to relate what had happened.

In all probability the man was dead.

They waited one day, two days, three days : the man did not reappear.

On the fourth day it was the tiger which reappeared and carried off a second sheep.

The terrified little shepherd came running to announce this fresh apparition of the ferocious animal.

It so happened that this time Seltanetta was watering the flowers in her windows when the shepherd entered the courtyard.

She heard what the child related.

She went back to Ammalat Bey and told him what she had heard.

Ammalat Bey had not heard a syllable of the story of Achmet Khan, but the words of Seltanetta were too precious for one to be lost.

Achmet Khan entered as Seltanetta concluded her tale.

‘Well,’ he asked, ‘what do you think of that, Ammalat?’

‘I think that I have always longed to hunt a tiger,’ said the young man, ‘and I thank Allah for granting me my desire. I will try my luck with the tiger.’

Seltanetta, pale but smiling, looked at Ammalat. She understood and, even whilst she shuddered, she felt proud.

Achmet Khan shook his head.

‘A tiger is not a boar of Daghestan, Ammalat.’

‘If I am once shown the track of the tiger I will follow it as though it were that of a boar.’

‘The track of a tiger often leads to death,’ insisted Achmet Khan, who had begun to get anxious about the torpor of his young friend and saw with joy that he was being roused from his lethargy.

‘Do you suppose,’ said Ammalat to him, ‘that I shall grow giddy on this slippery path, and that where your nouker has been I cannot go? If the heart of an Avare is as hard as the granite of his mountains, the heart of a native of Daghestan is tempered like his steel.’

Achmet Khan held out his hand to him, smiling.

‘On the steel of your heart, brother,’ he said, ‘the tiger will break its teeth, whilst the eagle will smash its double beak. When do you start?’

‘Two hours before dawn.’

‘Very well,’ said Achmet Khan, ‘I will find a guide for you.’

‘He is already found,’ said a voice behind the two men.

Achmet Khan turned round and recognised Nephtali.

‘Oh, it is you?’ said he.

‘Yes. I heard that a tiger had eaten one of our sheep and killed one of your noukers, and I came to tell you—my father’s friend—I wish to prove to you that I am good for other things besides stopping travellers on mountain paths in order to offer them hospitality. I have come to kill the tiger.’

‘So be it,’ said Ammalat; ‘but you come too late.’

‘Why?’ asked the young Tchetchen. ‘We shall be two for the journey and two for the fight. The son of my father is worthy to walk by the side of a prince, even if that prince be the nephew of the Chamkal of Tarkowski. Ask Achmet Khan.’

‘I require nobody to assist me in my enterprise,’ replied the young man with pride.

‘You are in need of no one,’ said Achmet Khan; ‘no one doubts that. But you have no right to refuse a companion who volunteers of his own free will to share a danger with you. My opinion is that

you ought to accept the offer of Nephtali. Take an oath like two brave Avars, and may Allah watch over you !’

Ammalat Bey directed his gaze to Seltanetta. The young girl looked at him. She knew Nephtali to be one of the bravest and most skilled hunters on the mountains, and she was not sorry to see Ammalat with a companion of whose courage she felt sure.

‘So be it,’ said Ammalat.

And he extended his hand to the young man.

It is the custom among the Avars and the Tchetchens, when two men undertake to incur the same danger together, for them to swear on the Koran never to abandon each other.

If one of the two breaks his oath, he is thrown from the summit of a rock, with his back to the precipice, as is suitable for a coward and a traitor.

These two young men went to the mosque, swore the oath of the Abrek, the Mollah blessed their weapons, and they took the mountain road amid the shouts of the crowd.

‘Both or neither of you,’ Achmet Khan shouted after them.

‘We will bring back the skin of the tiger or we will die,’ replied the two hunters.

Ammalat Bey had not said farewell to Seltanetta, but on the highest tower of the palace of the Khan the girl stood with her handkerchief in her hand.

And she waved her handkerchief until the two men had disappeared on the mountain.

Needless to say, Ammalat Bey walked behind and was the last to lose sight of the village.

CHAPTER V.

THE next day passed.

That day no news of the hunters was expected.

The day after dawned—night fell.

By evening the old men had grown tired of looking along the road.

They had seen nothing.

Perhaps there was not a single hearth in all Khurzuk round which the enterprise of the two young Abreks had not been discussed. But among all the hearts none was more sad or more anxious than the heart of Seltanetta.

If a cry was heard in the courtyard, if a noise echoed on the staircase, her blood began to course madly through her veins, her breath came with difficulty, she ran to the window, she made inquiries at the door, and then, deceived for the twentieth time, with head bowed down and a far-away look in her eyes, she resumed her needlework, which for the first

time seemed horribly stupid. Every question she asked, without pronouncing the name of Ammalat, had reference to him. She asked her father and her brothers what wounds a tiger inflicted, how far off the beast had been seen, how long it took to go from the place where it had been seen to the village, and after each question, she sadly shook her head and said to herself :

‘ They are lost.’

The third day proved that the anxiety was not without cause.

About two in the afternoon, a pale young man, with torn clothes, covered with clotted blood, weakened by fatigue and hunger, reached the first house in the aoul.

It was Nephtali.

He was surrounded and eagerly questioned.

This is what he related :

‘ The very day we left Khurzuk, we recognised the tracks of the beast. But it was too late, night was falling : we might miss the trail, get lost, and fall into its clutches without a struggle. So we postponed the attack until the following day.

‘ A hundred feet from us we saw a cave which I knew. We entered it. A stone served to close the entrance and we slept peacefully on our bourkas.

‘ The next day we awoke at dawn, a roar heard on the mountain having told us it was time to rise.

‘ We examined the priming of our guns, passed our ramrods down the barrels, made certain that our kanjiars were easy in the scabbards, and we set forth.

‘ As we advanced deeper into the forest, the road became more narrow and the tracks more distinct.

‘ Pools of blood, broken bones, bits of flesh, clearly said “ This is the path of the tiger.”

‘ On the road we found, intact, the two hands of a man ; no doubt those of the nouker of Achmet Khan.

‘ It is well known that the wild beasts, which devour whole bodies, never dare touch the hands, which are the signs of man’s supremacy over the animal world.

‘ We proceeded at a foot’s pace and with caution, for it was evident that we were approaching the lair of the tiger.

‘ Suddenly we arrived at a glade white with bones. In the middle was lying the tiger, playing with a human skull, as a cat plays with a wooden ball.

‘ An ambition seized me, and I accuse myself of it.

It was to kill the tiger. Without troubling myself where my companion was, I aimed at the tiger and fired.

‘Where I hit it I do not know. But in the midst of the smoke, before it had cleared away, I saw a yellow flash, and at the same time it seemed to me as if Schah-Abrouz¹ fell on my head.

‘I saw nothing more. I heard nothing more except a shot and a shout.

‘I had fainted.

‘How long I remained unconscious I do not know. When I reopened my eyes again, it seemed from the freshness of the air and the position of the sun that it must have been an hour or two after daybreak.

‘Around me all was tranquil.

‘I still held my gun in my hand.

‘Ammalat’s gun, broken in two pieces, was about ten feet from the spot where I had fallen.

‘The stones were covered with blood, but whose blood? The blood of the tiger or of Ammalat?

‘All round me the bushes were torn up by the roots.

‘It was easy to see that a terrible struggle had taken place—a mortal combat.

‘And yet I found neither the corpse of the man nor of the beast.

¹ One of the highest mountains of the Caucasus.

‘I shouted to Ammalat with all my strength, but no one replied.

‘I wished to follow the track of the tiger, to find Ammalat alive, or to die on his body. But I was so weak that after a hundred yards I was obliged to rest.

‘All at once a hope inspired me. That having killed the tiger and thinking me dead he had returned to Kh urzuk.

‘I collected all my strength. I took the road to the aoul. You have not seen him ?

‘I arrive like a crushed serpent. You have my life in your hands. I have abandoned my kumack in peril : do to me what you think right.

‘Whatever the judgment you decide, I shall not complain. If you think I have merited death, I will die with resignation.

‘If you leave me life, I will live blessing you.

‘Allah is my witness that I have done all a man could do.’

A murmur rose among his audience.

Some accused Nephtali ; others excused him ; all pitied him.

The popular opinion was that Nephtali had run away, forsaking Ammalat, that he had invented the whole story he had just related, and that he had consequently betrayed his kumack.

His wounds were slight. Would the shock of the onset of the tiger produce so long and so deep a swoon ?

Then, further suspicions began to be disclosed. Nephtali had been almost brought up by Achmet Khan, who was kumack to his father, as was well known.

It was asserted that he had ceased coming to the village of Khurzuk because he was in love with Seltanetta, and was not of sufficiently high birth to marry the daughter of the Khan, though all mountaineers are equal.

In the aoul, the probability of the union of Ammalat and Seltanetta had been discussed.

Actuated by jealousy, might not Nephtali have left Ammalat Bey to die ?

Or might he not have even killed him ?

When a wicked thought enters the head of a man, it is as though a bad seed had fallen to the ground, and it shoots up more rapidly and more vigorously than the other, fills all the space, chokes it, and ultimately flourishes alone.

But one cry dominated all the cries—one decision swept all other decisions before it.

‘ Let us take him to Achmet Khan. Achmet Khan shall decide.’

And, with a great noise, the whole crowd surged in the direction of the castle.

Seltanetta heard the clamour. She ran to the window ; she saw the crowd. Vainly in the middle of the crowd did she search for Ammalat Bey.

But she recognised Nephtali.

Nephtali alone.

A wicked thought crossed even her mind—she, poor child, who had never thought ill of her neighbour.

She ran to the steps leading up to the house, just as her father from his side arrived there and as Nephtali was led by the people into the courtyard.

He bowed before the Khan.

‘Speak,’ said Achmet Khan to him.

Nephtali again related the same story without altering a word.

Seltanetta listened, coldly stiff, immovable, dumb like a statue.

‘Coward,’ was all that Achmet Khan would say to him ; ‘it is fortunate for you that you are not an Avar but a Tchetchen.’

‘By the bones of my father, whose death you announced to me, Achmet Khan, I have told the truth,’ replied Nephtali. ‘Now ask of me what you will.’

‘You took an oath,’ said Achmet Khan, ‘to return with your companion or with the skin of the tiger. You devoted yourself to death if you did not

keep your oath, and you have not kept it—you must die.'

'When?' asked Nephtali.

'I give you three days during which search shall be made. If during those three days Ammalat Bey is not found, or your innocence proved, you shall die.

'All of you, do you hear?' said Achmet Khan to the crowd. 'I give him three days, and during those three days no one is to jeer at him, no one to insult him, or to touch a hair of his head. Only, should he try to run away, he is to be shot like a dog.

'Son of Mahomed Ali, I have pronounced judgment on you as your father would have done.'

Then, to his noukers:

'Take him away,' he added; 'you shall answer for him with your heads.'

Then, pulling his papak over his eyes:

'Come,' said he to Seltanetta, 'let us return indoors. If we do not find Ammalat alive, his death shall be avenged.'

Nephtali was conducted to the prison of the fortress.

That same day thirty mountaineers departed, armed as for battle. They were going in search of Ammalat Bey.

It was a point of honour with Achmet Khan if he did not find Ammalat alive, to at least recover his bones and give them burial. Often these men throw themselves into the hottest fight to recover their friend or their chief from the hands of the Russians, and then fall on his corpse, preferring to die with him rather than forsake him.

Seltanetta had left the arm of her father and returned to her own chamber. Outwardly she appeared calm : she did not complain, she did not cry.

But her mother spoke to her and she did not answer. The spark of her father's chibouque burnt her dress : she did not notice it. The wind blew from the mountain and she exposed her bare head to it.

All [the most conflicting emotions struggled in her heart, and broke it. But her heart was far from her looks. Not a muscle of her face betrayed the sufferings of her heart.

The pride of the daughter of the Khan fought with the love of Seltanetta, and it would have been impossible to say whether pride or love would succumb.

So she passed the rest of the day.

At night, when alone, she could cry at her ease.

She opened her window, leant her elbows on the sill, and remained with eyes fixed on the mountain.

It seemed to her that every minute she must hear some sound which would announce the arrival of Ammalat—her name uttered in the night air by his beloved voice—something like a song of joy or a cry of pain.

She heard nothing beyond the plaintive crying of the jackals, those slaves of the lion and tiger, which those sultans of the mountain and the desert command to give up their prey to them.

And the distant but incessant noise of the waterfall which poured from the summit of Gudurdach.

The noise reminded her of a walk she had often taken with Ammalat.

It led to the ruins of a Christian convent. The Avares had been Mahometans for less than a century. It led to the ruins of a Christian convent, situated about two versts from Khurzuk. The hand of time had respected the church, and, which rarely happens, men had not been more destructive than time. It had remained intact amid the ruins of other buildings. But the ivy had entered through the broken windows, and had

covered the interior with its green mantle, whilst the trees had grown in the spaces between the stones which they had more and more disjointed. A moss as exquisite as the finest carpet had spread over the slabs, and its freshness, maintained by a stream which had made for itself a channel through the wall, flowing limpid like liquid crystals all the length of the chapel, converted it into a delicious retreat on the burning summer days.

Very often had Seltanetta come with Ammalat—accompanied by her servant, Sekina—to sit under the cool cupola, and to dream by the murmur of the little stream, in which a mountain goat would often be quenching its thirst until it bounded away, frightened at the sight of the two young people.

‘To-morrow,’ she said, ‘I will go without you to the chapel where I have so often been with you, my dear Ammalat.’

Weary of the cry of the jackal, which seemed an evil omen to her, the girl shut her window and threw herself on her bed.

In the morning she called Sekina and said to her :

‘Come, let us walk on the bank of the Dousene.’

All along the road Seltanetta thought, with a sweet sadness, of this place so quiet, so cool, so still.

When she reached it, she thought it would be a profanation not to enter it alone with her memories.

She sent Sekina to gather blackberries, and bade her come to find her near the stream. Then she crossed the mossy threshold of the chapel.

The dim light of the interior ; the song of the swallows who, in spring, had made their nests there ; the murmur of the brook, all helped to dissolve into tears the load which weighed on her heart. She lay down on the bank of the stream and, as through a cloud, she watched her tears fall into the water.

All at once she heard the sound of a footstep too firm to be that of Sekina. She raised her head and uttered a cry of terror.

Before her stood a man covered with blood and mud. A tiger's skin, the head of which encircled his face, fell from his shoulders to the ground.

Seltanetta's first cry had been of terror, the second was of joy.

Through the dust, the mud, and the blood with which he was covered, beneath the skin of the tiger, she had recognised Ammalat Bey.

Then, forgetting everything in the world, she sprang to her feet, and quickly running, full of joy and love, she threw herself on his breast.

Ammalat, in his turn, uttered a cry. His mouth

rested like a bee on the pink lips of Seltanetta. Without speaking, they understood one another. This time, losing all control, the young man cried :

‘Then you love me, Seltanetta?’

Overcome at her own boldness, blushing after the kiss of her lover, the girl withdrew her lips from those of Ammalat, and gently pushed him away.

Then, alarmed and ready to permit her to escape from his arms :

‘Do you not love me?’ asked Ammalat.

‘May Allah preserve me!’ said the innocent girl, lowering her eyelids but not her eyes. ‘Love! What terrible word did you then utter?’

‘It is the sweetest word in creation, Seltanetta. The sun is love, the spring is love, the flowers are love.’

‘Ammalat,’ said the girl, ‘about a year ago, a woman uttering fearful shrieks, leaving her house without a veil and all bleeding, fell at my feet in the middle of the dusty street.

‘A man followed her, dagger in hand.

‘I ran back to the castle, but it seemed to me that this woman pursued me. For a long time I used to wake in the night, thinking I heard her shrieks, and in the dark I used to see her again, covered with blood and struggling on the ground.

‘Then I inquired why this unhappy woman had been killed and what crime she had committed for her murderer to go unpunished. I was told :

“‘She loved a young man.”’

‘Oh, it was not because she loved, that she was killed, dear child.’

‘Why, then ?’

‘It was because she had betrayed the man she loved.’

‘Betrayed ! What does that mean ? I do not understand, Ammalat.’

‘God grant you may never understand.’

Then gathering all the tenderness in his heart to make it pass into the intonation of his voice :

‘You love me, do you not, Seltanetta ?’

‘I think so,’ said the girl.

‘Well, do you think you could ever feel for another the same feeling which you have towards me ?’

‘Never,’ replied Seltanetta quickly.

‘That would be—do you see—betraying me.’

Seltanetta looked at Ammalat with those eyes which Eastern women possess, and which poets have found can be only compared to those of a gazelle.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘if you only knew, Ammalat, what

I have suffered the last four days when I have not seen you! I did not know what absence meant. When my father or my brothers leave me, I weep at saying good-bye. I bade you farewell without weeping, it is true, but I have since wept so freely. Well, listen, Ammalat,' continued the girl, 'one thing I have perceived and which I want to tell you: it is that I could not live without you.'

'And I,' said the young man, 'not only could not live without you, but to die for you, my beloved, to sacrifice not only my life but my soul——'

Footsteps were heard outside: it was Sekina, returning with her hands full of blackberries.

She uttered a shriek of terror on perceiving the young man, but recognising him:

'O, prince,' she cried, 'then you are not dead?'

These words reminded Seltanetta that she was not alone in her anxiety about Ammalat, that her father was impatiently awaiting news of him, and that there was a poor prisoner whose life depended on the return of Ammalat.

On the road back, Ammalat told Seltanetta all that had occurred between him and the tiger.

Nephtali had spoken the literal truth about all the first portion of what had happened.

Here is what subsequently took place:

The moment Nephtali had been knocked down by the tiger, Ammalat had fired.

Ammalat Bey's shot broke its lower jaw.

The tiger instantly released Nephtali and sprang upon Ammalat, who was waiting for it, pistol in hand, which he discharged as he sprang on one side.

The bullet penetrated the eye of the tiger and through the eye into the brain.

Overcome by the pain, the animal began to bound and to roll on the ground.

It seemed maddened and blinded.

Ammalat threw down his pistol, seized his gun by the barrel, approached the tiger, gave it a violent blow on the head——

The gun was shattered to pieces.

The animal seemed to acknowledge its defeat, and proceeded to run away. One of its forepaws had been broken by Nephtali's shot, its jaw was hanging, and one eye protruded from the socket.

But, wounded though it was, its speed was more rapid than that of Ammalat Bey.

Ammalat Bey proceeded to track it by the blood-stains, whilst he reloaded his pistol. From time to time he came to spots where the animal had halted and writhed. At these places the ground, which was

soaked in blood, was torn up, the grass pulled out by the roots, and the shrubs in ribbons.

From time to time also he saw the animal dragging itself along with difficulty, crawling rather than walking. Then he hastened his own steps, but the moment that the tiger felt it was being pursued, it made a fresh effort and outstripped the hunter.

This chase endured the whole day without halt or truce. Night fell—Ammalat Bey was obliged to halt. In the dark he would have lost the track of the animal.

He had thrown away his bourka, his papak, his tchouka, everything that could hinder him on his way, and the only garments he retained were his bechmett and his drawers, whilst as weapons he had only his kanjiar and his pistol.

In the morning he woke, frozen and famished with hunger.

The moment the light permitted, he again followed the track of the tiger.

Before long he saw it again.

But this time, despairing of escape by flight, the tiger was not only waiting for him, but came crouching towards him.

It could no longer stand on its legs, it could not spring : loss of blood had entailed loss of strength.

Ammalat Bey spared it half the intervening distance.

At ten paces from him the animal paused.

One of the eyes of the tiger was put out, the other shone like a live coal. Ammalat Bey, who with a pistol would not miss a rouble in the air, put a bullet in the other eye.

The animal made one bound and fell on its back, extended its three terrible paws in supreme agony—the fourth was broken—stiffened, uttered one roar and expired.

Ammalat Bey fell on it. This time it was the famished man who seemed to desire to devour the tiger.

With his dagger he opened the artery of the neck and drank the blood which flowed out.

Then he opened the breast and ate a portion of the heart, which was still warm.

The Arabs of Algeria, when they kill a lion, make their sons eat its bleeding heart in order to render them more courageous.

The Greeks also ate the hearts of eagles.

Next, he flayed the animal with his kanjiar and threw the skin over his shoulders.

Only then did he look around him. The morning was wet, a thick fog hung over the mountains, nothing could be seen at a distance of ten paces.

He sat down on a rock and waited.

The day passed. Night came. He heard the noise of the wings of eagles returning to their eyries amid the clouds.

With his pistol, some powder, and dried leaves he made a fire. A piece of the heart of the tiger, grilled on the ashes, formed his supper.

Then, turning the hairy side inwards, he wrapped himself in the skin of the animal and fell asleep.

He was awakened by the first rays of the sun. He knew that Khurzuk was westward.

He walked towards the west.

When he reached the edge of the wood, he perceived Khurzuk glittering white on the rocks.

He was thirsty. The tiger had no more blood in which he might quench his thirst. Ammalat Bey recollected the pure spring which flowed in the chapel.

He descended by the quickest way, past rocks and precipices, clinging to tufts of grass, roots of trees, or projecting stones.

At last he reached the valley.

He rapidly ran towards the chapel, like a thirsty deer.

But at the entrance he saw a woman, heard a cry, and recognised Seltanetta.

He forgot all—thirst, hunger, fatigue—all except his love, gratitude, and glory to God.

As Ammalat Bey pronounced the last words of his narrative, he arrived with the girl and her maid at the first houses of Khurzuk.

A shout, raised by those who first perceived them, passed through the whole crowd as rapidly as a train of gunpowder.

All the inhabitants of Khurzuk rushed out of their houses, and formed a procession behind the two young folk.

The shout of 'Ammalat Bey! Ammalat Bey!' startled Achmet Khan in the recesses of his harem.

He reached the summit of the staircase of his castle just as the two young people were ascending the first steps.

In spite of the efforts he made to remain grave and calm, as becomes a good Mussulman in the presence of joy or sorrow, he opened his arms to Ammalat Bey.

As if she had something for which to be forgiven, Seltanetta threw herself at the same time as her lover on the breast of her father, who clasped them in the same embrace and welcomed them both with the same kiss.

‘Father,’ said Seltanetta, ‘we have been unjust to Nephtali. Everything happened as he related.’

The Khan gave orders for the release of the captive.

Then he caused an ox and ten sheep to be slaughtered, so that the return of Ammalat Bey might be celebrated in all the aoul.

But when Ammalat Bey had related to Achmet Khan all he had already told Seltanetta, he sent for Nephtali.

‘Nephtali,’ he said, ‘full justice shall be rendered to you. If you desire to enter my service, you shall be chief of my noukers.’

‘No, thank you,’ replied the young man. ‘I am a Tchetchen and not an Avar. I came to you in order to kill the tiger which had eaten your sheep. I have nothing more to do here. Farewell, Achmet Khan.’

He approached Ammalat Bey and held out his hand.

‘Good-bye, kumack,’ he said, ‘for life or death.’

Then, as he passed before Seltanetta :

‘Shine eternally, beautiful star of the morning,’ he said as he bowed to her.

And he departed with the mien of one quitting a throne-room.

Achmet Khan waited until the door was shut.

‘And now, Ammalat Bey,’ said he, ‘be doubly welcome. After the tiger hunt, the lion hunt.

‘To-morrow we march against the Russians.’

‘Allah!’ cried Seltanetta sorrowfully, ‘more expeditions, more deaths! When will blood cease to flow from the mountains?’

‘When the rivers of the mountains flow with milk into the valleys, when the sugar-canes sprout on the summit of Elbruz,’ said Achmet Khan with a smile.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW beautiful is the noisy Terek in the cave of Dariol! There, like a genii borrowing its strength from the heavens, it struggles against Nature. In certain nooks, shining and rigid like a sword, which pierces a wall of granite, it glitters among the rocks. Elsewhere, dark and frothy, it hurls and overturns enormous rocks in its wrath, bearing them in its wake. On dark nights, when the belated horseman passes along the sharp ridge which rises above it, and wraps his bourka around him, all the horrors created by the most fantastic imagination could not be compared with the reality which surrounds him. Torrents, swollen by the rains, dash past his feet with a hollow noise, falling from the crest of the rocks which hang over his head, and which threaten every moment to crush him. Suddenly a flash of lightning cleaves the obscurity, and with terror he sees only

the dark cloud which surrounds him, and beneath him an appalling precipice : rocks everywhere, in front of him, behind him, beside him, and bounding from rock to rock the raging Terek rushing like a foaming fire. For a moment its rapid and troubled waves, like spirits from hell, tumbled to the bottom of the precipice with a horrible noise, and appeared in the depths of the abyss like a crowd of spectres pursued by the sword of an archangel. Huge stones followed the course of the river with a funereal crash, and then, dazzled once more by the flashing serpent of fire, the traveller again finds himself plunged into the ocean of the night. Then, in its turn, the rumbling thunder shakes the rocks with a noise which might be made by a cascade of mountains tumbling on one another. The echo of earth answers the artillery of heaven, and then once more the lightning, and again the night ! Then thunder, then again the convulsion of an entire group of mountains, as if the whole range of the Caucasus shook its granite shoulders ! A shower of stones fall, precipitates itself, rebounds. Your frightened horse stops, draws back, bent on its hamstrings, rears with its mane flying in the wind, hitting you in the face. A spirit passes in the air, plaintive like the soul of one dead. You shiver, your forehead is damp with perspiration, your heart contracts, and,

in spite of yourself, the prayer which your mother taught you in childhood rises to your lips.

And yet, with what charm and sweetness does the morning, with rosy visage and bluish foot, visit the caverns in which the Terek plunges ; clouds, chased away by the wind, rise from the surface of the earth, and cling to the angles of the glaciers. Above them a band of light defines the outlines of the western mountains. The rocks glisten, silvered by the drops of rain, and the Terek, always dark, always angry, always foaming, winds through the stones as though searching a large bed in which to court repose.

Yet one thing is missing in the Caucasus, and that is rivers and lakes in which the giants of creation can look at themselves. The Terek, twisting its course at the foot of precipices, seems a stream or at least a torrent. But under Vladékavkas, on entering the valley, it rids itself of the stones it has brought from the mountains, and flows wide and free, always rapidly, but with less noise, as though it were resting and taking breath, wearied with its painful labour. At last, after having attained the Kabarda, it turns westward like a pious Mussulman, and inundating its two banks, always at war one with the other, it rushes across the Steppes in order to cast

itself behind Kisliar, in the abyss of the Caspian Sea.

But before reaching the long repose, it has already paid its tribute, and, like a rough labourer, it has made the vast herds of sheep move on. On the right bank, between the woods and the mountains are scattered the aouls of the Kabardians, which we confound with the Tchertchen by giving them the general name of Tchetchen. These are situated lower down and nearer the sea. The territories are under subjection, but only outwardly. In reality they are the haunts of brigands, who profit at the same time by their friendship with the Russians and by the produce of their mountaineering robbery. Having a free entry everywhere, they warn their fellow-countrymen of the movements of the soldiers, of the number of the garrisons, of the state of the fortresses ; hide their friends in their dwellings when they go on expeditions, share or buy the booty on their return, provide them with salt and Russian powder, and often personally assist them in their forays. The worst of it all is that the hostile mountaineers, having the same costume as those who have been subjugated, approach travellers without being recognised, attack them if they are the stronger, and if they are weaker pass by

with a greeting and with hands laid on their hearts.

Thus do those who have submitted.

And for the latter, it must be said their position between these two terrible neighbours well-nigh forces them into this duplicity. Aware that, owing to the obstacle presented by the river, the Russians could not have time to come to their defence against the mountaineers, they are obliged to lend assistance to their fellow-countrymen; but all the same they pretend to be friendly to the Russians, before whose power they tremble. Every one of them is prepared to be the kumack of a Russian in the morning, and at night the guide of a mountaineer.

As to the right bank of the Terek, it is covered with Russian stanizas belonging to Cossacks of the Line. Between these stanizas are simple villages. The Cossacks only differ from the mountaineers by keeping their heads unshorn. But apart from that their arms, their clothes, and their gait are the same. It is a fine thing to see them come to blows with the mountaineers. It is not, strictly speaking, a combat. It is a tournament in which each wishes to display his superiority in courage and strength. Two Cossacks will bravely charge four horsemen, and

with equal numbers they are always victorious. They all speak Tartar, are all on friendly terms with the mountaineers; sometimes are even related by their wives, who they carry off to their homes. But afield they are mortal enemies. Although the Cossacks are strictly forbidden to cross the Terek, the bravest swim across it, either for pleasure or on business. When night arrives the mountaineers do as much: lie down on the grass, crawl through the bushes, and suddenly appear on the road before travellers, who are carried away captive and a ransom demanded if they do not defend themselves, and who are killed if they make a defence.

It sometimes happens that the most enterprising pass two or three days among the vines near the villages, waiting for an opportunity to make a raid. This is why a Cossack of the Line never leaves his house, never walks a single pace without his faithful dagger, will never go to the field without his gun. He ploughs, sows, cultivates, and reaps his land always fully armed. This is the reason why the mountaineers avoid the stanizas and generally attack small villages or audaciously make incursions into the interior of the provinces. In such a case a fight is inevitable, and the bravest horsemen hasten to take part in it in order to make a name for

themselves, which they prize above everything—even above booty.

During the autumn of 1819, the time when the events we are relating took place, the Kabardians and the Tchertchens, inspired by the absence of General Yermatoff, had combined to the number of about fifteen hundred in order to devastate some villages beyond the Terek, to take prisoners, and to carry off cattle.

Their chief was the Karbardian Prince Djemboulat.

Ammalat Bey, who had come to this prince with a letter from Achmet Khan, had been very cordially received, and would have been placed in command of a division had there been any order or any regular troops among the bandits.

His horse and his individual bravery indicated to each one his place in a struggle. At first anxiety was felt as to how the affair would commence and the enemy be engaged, but later on neither order nor discipline was observed and the fight ended at random.

After having informed the neighbouring princes who were to take part with him in the expedition, Djemboulat indicated the meeting-place, and at a given signal were heard in all the territories the shouts

of 'Guray, Guray!' which means 'To Arms, to Arms!' and in a few hours Kabardian and Tchertchen horsemen appeared from all sides.

Fearing betrayal, no one except the chief knew where the night would be spent, nor where they would cross the river. Dividing themselves into small bands, the mountaineers reached the subjugated aouls, and there awaited darkness. The subjugated people received their fellow-countrymen with every sort of demonstrative joy, but the distrustful Djemmboulat did not give credence to this apparent fidelity. He placed sentries everywhere, announcing to the inhabitants that anyone would be at once cut down who should under any pretext whatever attempt to pass the line. Most of the horsemen put up in the houses of their relatives or friends, but Djemmboulat and Ammalat Bey remained in the field, lying before the fire during 'the time needed to rest their horses. Djemmboulat thought of the Russians and of the struggle he was about to wage, but Ammalat Bey was far from the field of battle. His thoughts took eagles' wings and flew over the mountains of Avarie, and his heart, obliged to languish far from her he loved, was broken with sorrow. The sound of the balalayka of the mountains, accompanied by a monotonous song, formed a

diversion to his sadness. He listened in spite of himself.

A Kabardian was singing this old song :

On the summit of the snowy Kassbeck,
Far from the wheat, far from the rye,
Watch the stormy clouds
Soar like eagles.

Who, amid these mists,
Are these riders white with rime ?
Allah ! They are our mountaineers
Pursued and not pursuing.

The Russians are at their very heels.
Higher, friends ! Come quicker, friends !
From the rock, mounting each crag,
Comes death in pursuit of you.

She is still far from you,
That fortress with the green foliage,
Where you will find shelter.
Higher ! Faster ! Courage, friends !

Fate has betrayed valour,
Your horses are out of breath,
Nothing can save you. Alas !
The hills are defeated by the plains.

But suddenly a pious Mollah
Fell on his knees, and his prayer
Mounting heavenwards to Allah
Across the sea of light.

‘ Towards the fugitives, Allah permit
That the forest, that sure retreat,
May move at the order of Mahomet,
Praise be to God : glory to the Prophet.’

‘Yes. Formerly it was so,’ said Djemmboulat with a sigh. ‘Our fathers believed in prayer, and God listened to them ; but now, my friend, the best safeguard is our courage, the surest prayer is our schaska. Listen, Ammalat,’ he continued, stroking his moustache, ‘I do not disguise from you that the fight will be hot. The Colonel has collected his division, but where is it ? How many men has he ? That is what I do not know : that is what none of us know.’

‘All the better,’ said Ammalat tranquilly ; ‘the more Russians there are, the easier to fire at them.’

‘Yes, but the more difficult to carry off the spoils.’

‘The loot does not matter to me. I wish for vengeance, and seek glory.’

‘Glory is good when it lays golden eggs, Ammalat. It is disgraceful to appear before one’s wife empty-handed. Winter is approaching. To entertain our friends we must collect our provisions at the expense of the Russians. Choose your place in advance, Ammalat. March in the front rank or stay near me with the Abreks.’

‘I shall be where the danger is. But what is the worth of these Abreks ?’

‘Everyone has his own. But these are among

the bravest. They swear to expose themselves during a certain time, more or less lengthy, to all perils, to give no quarter to enemies, to forgive no offence, not even that of a friend, of a brother ; to take everything they choose, everywhere where what they choose catches their eye ; the oath once sworn, the man who takes it may kill, plunder, or steal without being punished—he is fulfilling an oath. Abreks of this kind are false friends, but they are fine foes.'

'And what can lead horsemen to take such oaths?' asked Ammalat, who, coming from the plains, was ignorant of most of the customs of the mountaineers.

'Some through excessive courage, others through excessive poverty ; others, in fact, because they are the prey of some secret sorrow. Look, for example, at that Kabardian rubbing his gun moistened by the evening mist. Well, he made himself an Abrek for five years because his mistress died of smallpox. During those five years, it would be better to have a tiger for a friend than he for a companion. He has already been wounded three times, and every wound excites instead of calming him.'

'A curious custom ; and how does an Abrek return to his family after such an existence?'

‘It is quite simple. The past is past. The Abrek forgets it, and the neighbours take care not to remember it. Having rid himself of his oath, he becomes gentle as a lamb. But it has grown quite dark. The Terek is covered with fog. It is time.’

Djemmboulat gave utterance to a whistle, which whistle was at once repeated all down the line of the camp. In less than five minutes everyone was in the saddle. After a consultation as to the most advantageous point for crossing the Terek, the little band softly descended to the bank of the river. Ammalat Bey admired the quietness not only of the riders but also of the horses—not one of them neighed on the way. Each of them, when putting a foot to the ground, appeared afraid of upsetting a stone and giving the alarm to the enemy. Before long they were at the edge of the river. The water was low. A promontory, half sand, half stones, stretched towards the opposite bank. By occupying double the time, the whole band could have crossed with dry feet. But half the riders went farther up the river in order to swim across, and to conceal the principal crossing from the Cossacks. Those who were sure of their horses leapt straight from the bank of the river into the water. Others fastened leather

bottles to their horses. The rapidity of the current dragged them away, but they ended by reaching the bank and mounted where they could. The thick fog hid all their movements.

It is a paramount necessity that the reader should know that on the whole line of the Terek, on the left bank of the river, there is a Line called the Sentinel Line. On each hillock is a Cossack post. If you pass in the daytime, you see on every elevation a long pole with a barrel at the extremity. This barrel is filled with straw and ready to be lighted at the first cry of alarm. To this pole a saddled horse is always attached, and close at hand, lying on the ground, is a sentinel.

By night the sentinels are doubled.

But despising all these precautions, wrapped in their bourkas, amid the darkness and the thick fog, the invaders passed the sentries like water through a sieve.

This time, it so happened once more. Some of the conquered mountaineers, having a marvellous knowledge of the Cossack outposts, put themselves at the head of each band and led it through the line.

At only one point was blood shed.

It was Djemmboulat himself who directed the blow.

Having reached the other side of the Terek, he ordered Ammalat Bey to climb the steep bank of the river, to approach a picket as near as possible, to count the number of men, and to knock his sword against the stones as many times as there were men. Ammalet Bey took a byway and disappeared into the night.

For some time Djemmboulat crawled like a serpent on the slope of the hillock.

The Cossack was drowsy ; he seemed to hear a slight noise from the direction of the edge of the water, and he looked anxiously towards the river.

Djemmboulat was not more than three feet from him : he lay flat on his stomach behind a bush.

‘Cursed ducks,’ murmured the Cossack, who came from the borders of the Don to those of the Terek, ‘even in the night they play about and fly and fight in the water like the fairies of Kiev.’

At this moment, Ammalat Bey had reached a point commanding a view of the hillock.

There were two Cossacks : one was lying asleep in his bourka, the other was half drowsy.

Ammalat Bey struck the stone twice with his sword.

The noise and the sparks attracted the attention of the sentry.

'Oh! oh!' he said, 'what is that? Wolves, perhaps: their paws clack and their eyes shine.'

And he turned round to see better.

At that moment he thought he distinguished the figure of a man in the darkness. He opened his mouth to cry 'To arms!' but the cry stopped on his lips, for the dagger of Djemmboulat was plunged to the hilt in his breast.

He fell without a groan.

The other Cossack did not even wake, but passed from life into death without a suspicion.

The pole was uprooted and thrown with the barrel into the river.

Here was an opening through which the larger portion of the band passed and rushed on to the country.

The invasion was complete and entirely successful. The peasants who attempted resistance were instantly killed. Others hid or ran away. A number of prisoners of both sexes were taken.

The Kabardians entered all the houses, took all they could find, carrying off everything that was transportable, but not burning the village, not devastating the fields, not ruining the vines.

‘Why harm the gift of God and the work of man?’ they said. ‘To do that is the act of a brigand and not of a noble mountaineer.’

In an hour all was over for the inhabitants of a league round.

But for the pillagers all was not over!

The cry ‘To arms!’ had echoed along the whole line. A shepherd had given the alarm.

He had been killed, but too late.

A large ring had been made round the wild horses scattered over the Steppes, and the whole herd gathered into it.

A Tcherken rider had put himself at the head of the herd on a splendid horse, which he set off at a gallop.

All the horses neighed, raised their tails, shook their manes in the wind, and followed the Tchetchen, who led the whole herd to the Terek, crossed between two posts, and jumped into the river on his horse.

All the other horses leapt after him.

They could be seen, crossing like shades, and the noise they made leaping into the water could be heard—but that was all!

CHAPTER VII.

AT sunrise the fog disappeared and disclosed a splendid but terrible spectacle.

An enormous company of horsemen were returning to the mountains, dragging their prisoners behind them : some fastened to the stirrups, others to the saddles, and others again to the tails of the horses.

All had their hands bound.

The tears and moans of despair were mingled with the shouts of triumph. Weighed down with the booty, delayed by the slow pace of the oxen, the raiders slowly advanced towards the Terek. The princes, nobles, and the best riders galloped gaily at the head and at the flank of the procession.

But from afar and from every side, Cossacks of the Line began to appear, sheltering themselves behind trees and hiding behind bushes.

The Tchetchens wheeled aside, firing irregularly, and the fighting commenced.

On all sides gunshots glittered and pinged.

The advanced guards hastened, driving the flocks before them and making them swim the river.

But rising over those in the rear could be seen clouds of dust.

A storm arose.

Six hundred mountaineers, with Djemmboulat and Ammalat Bey at their head, checked their horses and faced about in order to allow their followers time to cross the river.

Regardless of order and with loud shouts they dashed back to encounter the Cossacks. But not a single gun was detached from its place on their backs, not a single sword shone in the hands of the riders.

The Tchetchens never make use of their weapons until the last moment.

At twenty feet only from the Cossacks did they raise their guns to their shoulders and fire. Then they flung their guns behind their backs once more, and drew their schaskas.

But while replying with a sharp volley, the Cossacks turned tail and fled.

Carried away by the ardour of the fight, the mountaineers pursued them, and the fugitives drew them in the direction of the wood.

In this wood were lying in ambush the horsemen of the 43rd Regiment.

They formed in squares, lowered bayonets, and fired on the Tchetchens.

In vain did the latter leap from their horses and endeavour to penetrate into the clump in order to fall on the rear and flanks of the Russians.

The artillery began to take a share and make its deep voice heard. Kotzarav, the terror of the Tchetchens, the man whose bravery was best known to them, commanded the Russian troops.

From that moment there was no doubt of the victory.

Three successive volleys from the artillery dispersed the mountaineers, who resumed their course towards the river.

But on the borders of the Terek, commanding the whole breadth of the river, another battery of artillery had taken up its position.

It opened fire.

The grape-shot dealt destruction on the mass.

At each round several horses, mortally wounded, swayed round and round in the river, dragging their riders down and drowning them.

Then it was terrible to see the prisoners bound to the horses and, like their captors, exposed to the Russians.

The river Terek, reddened with blood, received friends and foes alike in its cold depths, tossing the corpses of men and beasts, and bearing the dead and the living alike towards the sea.

The rear remained, protecting the retreat, struggling like lions against hunters. Djemmboulat and Ammalat Bey with a hundred horsemen guarded the crossing, charging the Russian infantry which advanced too near, falling upon the Cossacks of the Line, returning to their companions, encouraging them by word and gesture, and finally plunged last of all into the Terek and crossed it in their turn.

Having attained the opposite bank, they leapt on their horses and, gun in hand, prepared to dispute the passage with the Russians, who, crowding on the bank, also appeared ready to cross the river.

But during this time, about two versts below the place where the battle had taken place, a considerable body of Cossacks had crossed the Terek and had spread themselves between the river and the mountains.

Their joyful and triumphant shouts behind the Terek alone revealed their presence.

The defeat of the Tchetchens was inevitable.

Ammalat Bey glanced round and realised the situation.

‘Well, Djemmboulat,’ he said, ‘all is over and our fate is decided. For your part, act as you choose. As for me, the Russians shall not take me alive. Better die by a bullet than by a rope.’

‘Do you think my hands were made for chains?’ asked Djemmboulat. ‘Allah forbid. The Russians may take my body, but never my soul.’

Then, remounting his horse and rising in his stirrups :

‘Brothers,’ he shouted, ‘luck has deserted us, but life remains. Let us sell our lives dearly to the giaours. The victor is not he who possesses the field of battle, but he who has glory. And glory is for the man who prefers death to captivity.’

‘Let us die, let us die!’ cried all the mountaineers in chorus.

‘And let our good steeds die with us, and after their death serve us as ramparts,’ said Djemmboulat.

And, jumping from his horse, he drew his dagger, and was the first to plunge it into its throat.

Each mountaineer did the same, with a shout of defiance to the Russians.

A vast ring of dead horses surrounded the Tchetchens.

Then each man lay down behind his horse, with his gun ready to fire.

The Cossacks halted on seeing the terrible defence the mountaineers were ready to make, hesitating to attack such desperate men.

Then, amid the silence, a voice was raised. It was that of a Tcherken singing his death-song.

The voice was firm, vibrating, full of spirit, so that the Russians could hear the song from the first word to the last :

Glory to us, death to our foe,
Better to die than to yield.

The chorus repeated :

Glory to us, death to our foe,
Better to die than to yield.

Then the solitary voice resumed :

Weep, fair ones in the mountains,
And remember us,
For each one of us will die
With a thought for his beloved !
This time the sleep of brave men
Will not be the gentle repose
Wafted by joyous music ;
No, it is the heavy sleep of stones
Which weigh on our eyelids
When the tempest growls in the sky.

But no, do not weep for us, fair women,
For your sisters, the green houris,
Will come, with eyes glistening like stars,
Flitting down on their white wings
To waft us to Paradise.

Do not peer along the road,
Put out the fire and lie down—
Mother, in vain your heart will listen,
Mother, do not wait for the dead ;
Go not to neighbours in the valley,
To those who would console you say :
My son will come to-morrow,
Your son is dead on the hill,
His heart broken in his breast,
His sword broken in his hand.

The Chorus :

Glory to us, death to our foe,
Better to die than to yield.

The Voice :

Do not weep vain tears, mother,
I die avenged.
Your milk flowing in my veins
Is changed to the blood of a lion.
Never has your son in a fight
Trembled from fear,
Nor listened to the advice of cowards.
He falls with hands unsoiled,
And it is on the land of the brave
That he sleeps his last sleep.

Pure, but how soon tainted,
Is the mountain water in springtime.
It glitters in the fields,
The dawn has a robe of flowers,
But it soon passes.

Brothers, let us pray,
For we pass in our turn
Tainted like spring water,
Lost like the dawn of day.
But at least in our wrath,

We shall have passed like a storm
Which reddens the sky in passing,
And alike on flowers or sand,
Leaves an indelible trace
Of fire, of smoke, and of blood.

The Chorus :

Glory to us, death to our foe,
Better to die than to yield.

Impressed by the grandeur of the picture before their eyes, the Cossacks and the hunters listened respectfully to this death-song of twelve (?) hundred brave men.

At last the signal was given. A terrible 'huzza' thundered through the Russian ranks.

The Tchetchens replied with the silence of death.

But at the moment when the Russians were not more than twenty feet from them, they rose, each marked his man, and at the word 'Fire' uttered by Djemmboulat Khan and Ammalat Bey, a belt of flame surrounded the besieged.

Then, breaking their guns, each man yelled his war-cry, drawing his schaska with his right hand, and his kanjiar with his left.

Three times did the Russians charge that bloody fortification ; three times were they repulsed.

The fourth time they prepared for a supreme effort ; for ten minutes more, like an enormous serpent

twisting itself in rings, swords and kanjiars could be seen, resembling scales and shooting forth lightning.

At last the gigantic reptile was broken in two or three fragments. The *mêlée* became terrible. The struggle was hand to hand. A rain of blood was poured amid the imprecations and groans of death.

The Abreks, that they might not be divided in the fight, had bound themselves to one another with their belts. Not one asked for mercy nor gave mercy.

All fell beneath the Russian bayonets.

A small group remained upright and still resisted. In the middle of this group Djemmboulat and Ammalat Bey fought like two Titans.

For an instant the Russians recoiled before this desperate defence and left a space.

‘Charge!’ cried Djemmboulat, becoming the assailant for the last time. ‘Charge, Ammalat Bey! Death is liberty!’

But Ammalat Bey could no longer hear the supreme call of the Tchetchen chief. A blow from the butt end of a gun had stretched him on the ground, covered by the slain, drenched with blood.

CHAPTER VII.

COLONEL WERKOWSKI TO HIS FIANCÉE, MARIE N.,
AT SMOLENSK.

Derbend, October 7, 1819.

TWO months! A brief space in the ordinary circumstances of my life. But for me the two months which have just passed, my beloved Marie, are two centuries. It is therefore two centuries, and not two months, since I received your dear letter.

Since then the moon has twice made the circuit of the earth.

I have a past which I recall with pleasure. I have a future into which I plunge with hope. But far from you, without news of you, I have no present. The Cossack, returning from the post, appears. He has a letter in his hand. I seize it, I recognise your handwriting. I break the seal, I kiss the lines penned by your adored hand, I devour the thoughts dictated by your pure heart. I am happy.

I am not on earth, I am in heaven. But I have barely put down the letter before anxious thoughts are already in my mind—that was all very well, no doubt, but all that has been—all that is perhaps no more. Is she well, she for whom I would give my life? Does she love me as much to-day as she did yesterday? Will the happy time ever come when we shall be united never again to part, when there shall be no more separation nor distance between us, when the expression of our love will never grow cold passing from the heart to paper? Or before that time should come, alas! the letters themselves might grow cold. Might not the fire, which burns in her heart, die out, little by little? Forgive me all these terrors, my love. They are the flowers which grow in the ground of absence. With my heart close to your heart I shall believe everything. Away from you, on the other hand, I doubt everything. You command me to let you have a share in my life, to tell you everything I do, all that occurs around me in this little whirlwind of which I am the centre; what I think of, how I occupy myself—and that day by day, minute by minute. Why, it makes me re-live all the anguish I have just described, you bad creature, who wish not only to be unhappy but to analyse my unhappiness, to lay bare my sufferings.

However, you wish it—I obey.

My life is the print of a chain on sand. My duties, by tiring me, if they do not distract me, at any rate help to pass the time. I am in a fearful climate, which no health could stand, in the midst of a society which suffocates my soul. I no longer find among my companions a single one who can understand me, and among the Asiatics not one who can share my feelings. All that surrounds me is so savage that I wound myself with what I come in contact, so confined that I seem to be breathing the air of a prison—sooner could fire be obtained from ice than a spark of pleasure from this accursed country.

I send you a detailed description of my last week. It is the most interesting and the most active of all those I have yet spent in the town of the iron gates.

I remember writing to you that we were returning, with the Governor-General of the Caucasus, from an expedition in Akoucha. We had been completely successful. Shah Ali Khan had escaped to Persia. We burnt a dozen villages, corn, wheat. We had sheared and roasted the sheep of the enemy on the spit. When at last the snow compelled the inhabitants to come down from their rocks, they

gave themselves up, and offered hostages, after which we returned to the fortress of Bousnaia. There our division had to separate for the winter season, and my regiment remained in its quarters.

At Derbend.

The following day the General wished to say good-bye to us, before undertaking another expedition over the Line. There was therefore a large gathering of people who wished to say good-bye to their beloved chief. Alexis Petrovich left his tent and came towards us. Who does not know his face, if not by sight, at any rate from his pictures? I do not know if there exists another such face in the world.

A poet has said of him :

Fly, Tchetchen ! He whose mouth
Never has threatened in vain,
Has awoke, gloomy and fierce.
He has said, ' We march to-morrow,'
The shot that whistles over the plain
Is his breath.
His word, haughty and peremptory,
Is the thunder of fights.
Around his thoughtful brow
Hovers the fate of kingdoms,
And death is hurled
Towards the goal he indicates.

And the poet has not said a word too much.

You should see his coolness in battle ; you should

see his ease of manner on a reception day : sometimes scattering among the Asiatics the waves of his flowered words, reflected like a Persian poem ; sometimes troubling them, disconcerting them, crushing them with a word. They may do their best to try and hide their most secret thoughts at the bottom of their hearts—his eye follows them there, and a week, a month, a year in advance, he tells them what they must do. It is amusing to see how men, with doubtful consciences, pale and blush when he tortures them with his long and penetrating look. Just as with the same look he distinguishes merit wherever it is to be found, rewards it with a smile, and, with a word which goes straight to the heart, he recompenses courage and devotion.

May God grant to every brave soldier the glory and happiness of serving under such a chief !

It is curious to see him in his relations with those who serve under him in his own house. It is a study for the observant. Every man distinguished by courage, spirit, or by any talent whatever has a free entry to, and free meals in, his house. There, no more rank, no more etiquette. Everyone may say what he thinks, do as he pleases. Alexis Petrovich ¹

¹ The Author has wished to depict the brave General Yermatoff, the oldest and the model Russian officer.

talks and laughs with each as if with a friend, teaches and instructs each like a father.

We were in camp last Tuesday, and during tea-time he was making his aide-de-camp read to him Napoleon's 'Campaign in Italy'—this poem of military art as he called it. Surrounding him was a group, judging or criticising the great captain who, after Hannibal and Charlemagne, had crossed the Alps, and who would have been satisfied with the remarks, and even with the criticisms of one who had so often argued with him about the Great Redoubt of Borodino.

The reading finished and tea over, gymnastics followed, running and jumping over ropes and ditches; trying one's strength in every way. The evening was glorious, the view magnificent. The camp was near Larki; the fortress of Bousnaia looked down on it. Behind the fortress the sun was setting. Below the rock was the house of the Chamkal; then, on the steepest slope, the town; lastly, to the west, the immense steppe, and beyond the steppe the blue carpet of the Caspian Sea. Tartar Beks, Tchetchen princes, Cossacks from all the rivers of Russia, hostages from the mountains, officers of every regiment, made up a most curious and picturesque scene. Uniforms, tchoukas, coats of mail, were

crowded together. Singers, dancers, and musicians made a separate group, and soldiers taking part in the *fête* walked about a few hundred feet from us, their schaskas cocked rakishly over their ears.

Conversation had turned on the quality of the different weapons of the Caucasus. Each praised his own as being of the best workmanship. Captain Bekouvetz, who had a blade bought at the village of Andrea, and had had it mounted at Kouba, maintained that he would cut in two three roubles placed one on top of the other. The wager was accepted, the three roubles were placed on a block of wood, and with his left hand Bekouvetz cut three roubles in two.

At this moment a wild bull plunged into the midst of the musicians and, to the great delight of all the onlookers, created the wildest confusion amongst them. Everyone ran away, escaped it by jumping on one side, and in trying to avoid it excited it by shouting.

The enraged animal turned towards the group in which General Yermatoff stood; some of the officers drew their swords, others their daggers, and placed themselves in front of the Governor-General. But putting them all aside, he drew his schaska and placed himself in the path of the bull. The latter, no doubt, decided that he had at last met a worthy opponent and fell on him.

With the agility of a young man the General avoided the bull, but in the act of eluding him he raised his arm. Something like a flash of lightning could be seen, while the head of the bull, severed from its shoulders by a single blow, fell at the feet of the General and remained embedded by its horns in the ground. The body made two or three more steps in the same direction, borne on by its charge, and rolled over, shedding pools of blood.

The spectators gave a shout of astonishment and admiration.

All the officers collected round the General, some examining the head of the bull and others its body.

‘Your Excellency has a sharp sword,’ said Captain Bekouvetz.

‘Worthy of being with your dagger, Captain,’ said the General.

And he presented the sword to him.

The Captain hesitated before accepting it.

‘Take it, take it,’ said Yermatoff, ‘it is yours.’

And he gave him, just as if it were an ordinary sword, this schaska, the blade of which alone had cost him three or four hundred roubles, and the scabbard of which was worth at least as much, if for nothing else, at any rate for the weight of its silver.

Everyone was still talking of this prodigious feat

of strength when an officer of the Cossack Line, sent by Colonel Kotzarev, was announced to the Governor-General.

The officer was brought before him and presented him with a report.

‘With your permission, gentlemen,’ said the General, as if he had been with his equals ; and there lies the remarkable side of this man. He constantly raises you to his level without ever descending to yours.

You may guess if the permission was granted.

He read the report, and as he read it he seemed to be approving under his breath.

At last, out loud :

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I have good news to announce ; the cross of St. George for one of our brave officers.’

Every one drew near with curiosity.

‘Well, Kotzarev it appears has exterminated twelve or fifteen hundred mountainers. The bandits had crossed the Terek and devastated a village, but Kotzarev rejoined them, surrounded them, and he sends me five prisoners—all that are left of the band.’

Then, turning to the Cossack officer :

‘Bring these gentlemen to me,’ he said ; ‘I wager there will be among them some faces I know.’

They were brought to him ; at the sight of them a cloud passed over his face, and his eyebrows contracted.

‘ Miserable creatures,’ he said to them, ‘ this is the third time you have been taken prisoners, and twice you have been released on taking oath to renounce brigandage. What is the matter with you ? You have prairies. You have herds of cattle. Am I not here to give you security ? Take them away and hang them with their own ropes. But they may choose among themselves one, to whom you may give his liberty after he has been present at the execution, in order that he may return and describe it to his comrades.’

Four men were led away. A fifth remained.

He was a Tartar Bey. We remarked him then for the first time. Up till then the others had absorbed all our attention.

He was a young man of twenty-three, of remarkable beauty, and shaped like the Apollo of Belvedere.

He awaited his turn in an attitude of supreme grace and with a kingly pride.

When the eye of the General rested on him, he saluted him and resumed his former attitude.

On his face one could read that complete resignation to Fate which is a Mahometan virtue.

Yermatoff's eye remained fixed on him, full of anger and menace, but no change took place in the countenance of the prisoner—he did not even lower his eyes.

‘Ammalat Bey,’ said the General at last, after a moment's silence, which appeared long even to those whose interest in what was passing was only aroused by curiosity, ‘Ammalat Bey, do you recollect that you are a Russian subject; that you live under Russian laws?’

‘I have not forgotten it,’ replied Ammalat Bey, ‘and if they defended my rights I should not have been brought before you to-day—guilty.’

‘You are both unjust and ungrateful,’ replied the General; ‘your father and you have fought against the Russians. If that had happened under the government of the Persians, from the Khalifas of which you claim descent, your family would no longer exist. But your Emperor is so good that, instead of punishing you, he has given you a government. How have you repaid him for his kindness? By open rebellion. But even that is not your greatest crime; you have received in your house an enemy of Russia; you allowed him to stab before your eyes an officer and two Russian soldiers; and yet, had you repented, I should have forgiven you, respecting

your youth and your customs. But no, you fled into the mountains, and with Achmet Khan you came and attacked a Russian outpost. Finally, you become one of Djemmboulat's chiefs, and you come with him to plunder the land of your friends.

‘There is no necessity for me to tell you what fate awaits you, is there?’

‘No, for I know it,’ calmly answered Ammalat Bey. ‘I shall be shot.’

‘No, a bullet is too noble a means of death for me to permit you to die by one,’ replied Yermatoff, angrily. ‘No, an araba shall be placed, pole in air. To the pole shall be attached a cord, and the cord shall be round your neck.’

‘It is precisely the same thing,’ replied Ammalat Bey, ‘only the death is quicker. But I have one favour to ask you; it is, that since I am condemned in advance, that you will not take the trouble to try me—the trial would not be long, I know—but it always means a delay.’

‘Granted,’ replied the General.

Then turning to his aide-de-camp: ‘Take him away,’ he said, ‘and by to-morrow morning let everything be over.’

They took him away.

The fate of this fine young man, so proud, so

calm, so resigned, had touched everyone. All pitied him, and the more sincerely because we knew it was impossible for him to escape ; an example being necessary and the decisions of Yermatoff always irrevocable.

No one therefore dared intercede for the unfortunate young man.

Everyone began to disperse.

I remarked that on going into his house the General looked gloomy. I, who know his heart, said to myself that perhaps he was angry that no one had disputed his wish.

I resolved to try.

I went to his house ten minutes after he had entered it.

He was alone—his elbow resting on a table. On this table was a report which he had begun for the Emperor.

Alexis Petrovich has, as you know, a great affection for me. I am one of his familiar friends, so he was not surprised to see me.

On the contrary, he seemed to expect me, for he said, smiling :

‘ I think, Andre Ivanovitch, that you must bear me ill-will—generally you walk into my house as if you were marching against a battery ; but to-day one

would think you were walking on eggs like the Mignon of your favourite poet. I wager that you have come to ask pardon for Ammalat.'

'By my faith, your Excellency has guessed right,' I replied.

'Sit down there and let us talk of this affair,' he said.

After a moment's silence he continued :

'I know it is said of me that I look upon a man's life as a toy, and that the blood of all these mountaineers is no more precious to me than the water which comes from their mountains. The most cruel conquerors used to hide their cruelty under an outward appearance of gentleness. I, on the contrary, have acquired for myself the reputation of being an unmerciful man. My name should protect our frontiers more securely than chains or fortresses. It is necessary for all these Asiatics to know that my word is as inflexible as death. A European may be convinced, may be touched, may be won over by kindness—an Asiatic never. To forgive him is more than a weakness, it is a crime ; it is for that reason that I act towards them without pity. I am cruel from humanity. The everlasting sight of the gallows can alone guarantee the Russians from death, and among the Mussulmen prevent betrayal in all those

who make a pretence of submitting, not one of whom does not conceal his anger, does not secretly prepare his vengeance. So my predecessors have said and my successors will say. Every time there has been, or every time there will be, a question of condemning to death, I have a desire with all my heart to pardon a man. I would willingly have spared this youth, but judge for yourself! Here is the situation. If I punish him, then come the tears shed over the victim. All that, my dear friend, is humbug. Laws exist—they must be carried out; lives are confided to me—I must watch over them. I never talk in this way, I never shed these fantastic tears; but every time I sign a death sentence my heart bleeds.'

Alexis Petrovich was moved; he rose, walked several times up and down his tent, sat down again, and continued:

'Well, never has this necessity for punishment appeared more cruel to me than to-day. Any one who has lived as long as I have among Asiatics would pay no more attention to a handsome face than to a letter of recommendation. But—do you see—the face, the figure, the voice, the whole appearance of this Ammalat have made a strong impression on me. I regret it.'

'A good heart is better than brains, General,'

I replied, 'and you are fortunately endowed—for you have both——'

'The heart of a public man, my dear friend, should lower arms before the mind. I know that quite well. I can pardon Ammalat—that depends on myself: but I also know that I ought to punish him. Daghestan is full of enemies. Larki, only half conquered, is ready to rise again at the first breath of wind from the mountains. All this must be cut short with the gallows, and the Tartars made to see that before the Russian law everything, even mercy, must bend. If I pardon Ammalat there will be but one cry: Yermatoff was afraid of the Chamkal!'

'Yes,' I replied; 'but since we are not here to follow the inclinations of the heart, but to discuss and to appreciate, do you not think, General, that the gratitude of Ammalat's family would carry great influence in the country?'

'The Chamkal, like all the others, is an Asiatic my dear Colonel,' interrupted Yermatoff, 'and he would be enchanted if this pretender to his principality no longer existed—so in all this business I do not in the least trouble myself about his relations.'

On seeing this kind of hesitation on the part of the Governor-General I pressed harder.

‘Let me do triple duty,’ I said to him; ‘do not give me any holiday this year, but grant me the young man’s pardon. He is young and Russia may find in him a good and a brave servant. I undertake the responsibility.’

Alexis Petrovich shook his head.

‘Listen,’ he said to me, ‘it is a sad thing to say’ but I make the observation as a philosopher and attack neither God nor Providence, but rarely have the good actions of this sort which I have done ever turned out well.’

‘Try again, General, and give us your word that if it turns out badly it shall be the last time.’

‘Very well; since you wish it, I pardon him. Besides, I was only waiting for a request like yours, which would excuse me in my own eyes. I grant him a full pardon. It is not my habit, when I have once given in, to bargain over the details, but remember one thing—you said you would take all the responsibility.’

‘Entirely. I will take him home with me and will answer for him with my life, General.’

‘Well, never trust him, and remember the old story of the viper kept warm in the bosom of the compassionate man. Oh! these Asiatics, these Asiatics! You will get to know them one day,

Werkowski. God grant it may not be at your own expense.'

I was so pleased that, instead of answering the General or at least thanking him, I ran to the tent where Ammalat was.

He was guarded by three sentinels. A lantern hanging in the centre was burning. I entered ; he was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not hear me.

I approached so closely as to almost touch him. He was stretched out on his bourka and was weeping.

That did not surprise me ; it is not cheerful to die at twenty-three.

These tears, of which I had just caught sight, caused me great pleasure.

They showed me the value of the pardon which I brought.

'Ammalat,' I said to him in Tartar ; 'Allah is great and the Sirdar is good—he gives you back your life.

The young man jumped to his feet ; he wished to speak, but he was so overcome that he was for some minutes unable to utter a word.

'Life !' he said ; 'he gives me my life !'

Then, with a bitter smile :

'I understand,' he added ; 'to let a man die slowly in a dark prison ; or, when he is accustomed to the hot sun of the East, to send him to languish

in the midst of the snow in the eternal night of Siberia ; to bury him alive ; to strip the leaves of all the pleasures off the tree of existence ; to separate him from his relations, from his friends, from his mistress ; to prohibit him from speaking, to forbid him to groan—that is what they call life ! It is the supreme mercy granted to the condemned man. If that is the pardon I am granted, if that is the mercy I am given, tell him that I do not desire such life and that I refuse such mercy.'

'You are mistaken, Ammalat,' I replied ; 'the pardon is complete, without conditions, without restrictions. You remain master of your lands, your actions, and your will. Here is your sword ; the General returns it to you, convinced that you will never draw it again except to fight for the Russians. You will live with me till all this miserable business is forgotten ; and in my house you shall be my friend, my brother.'

It was a new experience for an Asiatic. He looked at me ; two large tears fell from his eyes.

'The Russians have completely conquered me,' he cried ; 'forgive me, Colonel, for having thought so badly of you all. From this moment I am a faithful servant of the Russian Emperor, and my heart and my sword are his. Oh ! my sword, my

sword!’ he added, looking lovingly at the blade. ‘May my tears wash away the Russian blood and the Tartar *nephtha*!’¹ When and how can I thank you for life and liberty?’

I feel sure, my dear Marie, that you will keep one of your sweetest kisses for me in this affair. Besides, in acting as I did, I did not think of anything but you. Marie will be pleased, I said to myself, Marie will reward me. But when shall I get my reward, my beloved? Your mourning must last over nine months more, and the Governor-General has refused my holiday, reminding me that I gave it up myself when I asked for Ammalat’s life. The fact is that my presence is necessary to the regiment; they are building barracks for the winter, and if I left, all the work would cease. I remain, therefore; but my heart, my poor heart! We have been three days at Derbend; Ammalat is with me. He does not talk; he becomes sadder and more unsociable every day; but he interests me all the more. He speaks Russian well, but by rote. I am teaching him the alphabet. He comprehends wonderfully. I hope to make an excellent pupil of him.

¹ The Tartars get the blackish tint on the blades of their swords and daggers by dipping them in *nephtha*.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGHTS OF AMMALAT BEY, TRANSLATED FROM
THE TARTAR.¹

EITHER I have slept till the present, or I am dreaming to-day. Here, then, is the new world which is called Thought : a beautiful, a magnificent, a splendid world, which has long been unknown to me, like the Milky Way, which is said to be composed of millions of stars. It seems to me that I am climbing the mountain of Science in the midst of night and in a mist. But the day is dawning, and the mist dispersing—at each step my horizon becomes clearer and larger, at each step I breathe more freely. I look at the sun, the sun forces me to lower my eyes, but already the clouds lie at my feet—cursed clouds, from the earth you prevent me seeing heaven, from heaven you prevent me seeing the earth.

How is it that these simple questions *why* and *how* have never entered my mind before? The

¹ Fragments found in the room occupied by Ammalat Bey in the house of Colonel Werkowski.

entire universe, with all the good and bad which is in it, was reflected in my soul as in the sea or in a mirror ; but my soul knew no more about it than the sea or a looking-glass. It is true I remembered many things, but what good did that do me ? The hawk does not understand why a hood is put over his eyes ; the horse does not understand why he is shod. I too did not understand why there are mountains here, steppes there ; here eternal snow, there oceans of blazing sand ; why we required storms and earthquakes, and thou Man, the most curious creation that came from the hand of the Creator, I never (think or rather never) thought of following thy mysterious course from the cradle to death. I confess that up till now I have looked at books and Life with the same eye—books without understanding the sense, Life without understanding its object. But Werkowski undoes the bandage over my eyes, disperses the mists from my mind : he gives me the means of learning, of understanding. With him I try my glowing wings, like a young swallow with its mother ; the distance and the height still astonish, but no longer alarm me. The time will come when I shall soar like the eagle in the azure irradiating from the heavens.

And yet, am I happier since Werkowski and his

books have taught me to think? Formerly a horse, a sword, a gun gave me pleasure, like a child, and now that I know the superiority of mind over matter, I no longer desire the things which I formerly coveted. I took myself seriously for a time. For a time I thought myself a great man ; now I am at least convinced of one thing—it is that I am nothing. I used not to see further back than my grandfather. Everybody before him was covered with an obscure veil : it was a dark night peopled with personages borrowed from stories and legends. The Caucasus was my horizon, but at least I slept peacefully in this dark night. I hoped to become celebrated one day in Daghestan, its mountains were the pedestal which I chose for my statue ; and now, in becoming clever, I learn from books that History peopled long before me the theatre which I had chosen for myself, with nations who fought gloriously, with heroes whose names had been repeated to the echo, not only in Daghestan but throughout the whole world, and that I did not know the name of these people. I was even ignorant of the existence of these heroes. Where are these people? Where are these heroes lost in the night of time, in the dust of centuries? I thought that the earth belonged to the Tartars, and behold, on casting my eyes on a simple geogra-

phical map I learn that they occupy a very little corner of a very little world ; that they are poor savages compared to the European world ; that nobody thinks of them, knows anything about them ; that nobody wishes to know anything about them. We are all worms—kings, heroes, great men are glow-worms, that is all. By Mahomet, it was hardly worth while tiring one's brains to arrive at such a truth.

What use is there in knowing the forces of Nature and the laws by which she governs, when my own forces are incapable of governing my mind ? I can quell the ocean, and I cannot keep back my tears. I can divert the lightning from my roof, and cannot chase sorrow from my heart. I was already unhappy enough when I had only my own emotions to oppress my soul, and now it is no longer emotions but the thoughts which swoop down on me, as my hawks swoop down on the poor birds which I begin to pity, a thing I should never have thought of formerly. A sick man gains very little by knowing his malady, if in learning it he learns at the same time that it is incurable. I suffer doubly since I have taken to analysing my sufferings.

But no, I am unjust ; reading shortens the long hours of separation which seem to me so many winter

nights, in giving me the faculty of writing my thoughts, that is, of placing the phantoms of my imagination on paper. This affords my heart a source of enjoyment.

My heart or my pride, I know not which.

Not my heart, for one day, when I see Seltanetta again, I will show her these pages where her name is more often found than that of Allah in the Koran. Here are the memories of my heart, I will say to her. Look, on that day I was thinking of you, on that night I was dreaming of you ; so between the lines you may count my tears, between the words my sighs. Perhaps we shall laugh together over those days, when I suffered so much, but shall I remember the past, when I hear you, my adored Seltanetta ? No, everything around me will be obliterated, and there will be no more clear space than that embraced by the light of your eyes. In that light my heart will melt in my bosom ; to forget myself beside you is sweeter than to make the world echo with my name.

You see it was certainly not pride.

I read stories of love, descriptions of women, of the passions of men, and firstly, not one of these heroines of romance is as beautiful at heart, in soul, or in body as my Seltanetta. And I myself bear no

moral resemblance to these men whose histories I read. I envy them their wit, their knowledge, their amiability, but not their love. The most burning of these loves is slow and cold ; it is a moonbeam playing on ice. No, I cannot believe that these men really loved, whose love so revealed itself.

There is another thing which I must confess. It is that I am always asking myself, 'What is friendship?' I do not know how to answer. I have a friend in Werkowski, a friend kind, sincere, attentive—well, he is a friend to me, but I am not a friend to him. I feel that I am not as responsive as he deserves and I blame myself for it, but it is not in my power to be otherwise—in my soul there is only room for Seltanetta, in my heart there is no feeling but love.

No, I will read no more—I do not understand what he says to me. Decidedly I was not made to climb the steps of science: my breath fails on the first step, I lose my head in the first difficulties. I entangle the net; instead of unfolding it, I tear and pull it out. I accept the encouragement of the Colonel on my progress, but who hinders the progress? Alas! It is she who is the happiness and the misfortune of my life. Love. I see Seltanetta in everything, I hear her everywhere, and often I neither

see nor hear anything but her. To forget her for a single moment would seem to me a crime: I can no more help loving her than I can help my heart beating. Can I live without air? Seltanetta is my light, my air, my life, my soul.

My hand trembles, my heart beats. If I were to write with my blood, it would burn the paper. Seltanetta, do you not know that you are killing me? Your face pursues me everywhere—the remembrance of your beauty is more dangerous for me than your beauty itself. The thoughts that this treasure of love which I have folded in my arms is lost to me for ever—throws me into despair, maddens me. My mind is going, my heart is breaking. I remember each feature of your face, each change of your countenance; each gesture of your arms, each pose of your figure; and your foot, that hiding-place of love; and your lips, that open pomegranate; and your shoulders, that quarry of marble. Oh! the very recollection of your voice makes my soul vibrate like the string of an instrument ready to break, and your kiss—the kiss in which I seemed to drink of the source of life. Night falls on me in rays of fire. Oh! one more kiss like that one in the chapel, one only, Seltanetta, and then death.

.

Colonel Werkowski, as we have seen, had observed the melancholy of Ammalat and, as we have also seen, he guessed the cause.

Wishing to distract him, he organised a boar-hunt, the favourite amusement of the Beys of Daghestan.

Twenty Beys with their noukers arrived in response to the Colonel's invitation, each prepared to do his best.

The snows of December were beginning to cover the summit of the mountains of Daghestan. The swelling Caspian Sea, unnavigable during the winter, beat against the foot of the wall of the Town of the Iron Gates, through the mist fluttered the wings of the bustard. All was dark and mournful. The soft rain which fell every night seemed like the tears of Time regretting past days. The old Tartars remained on the steppes, wrapped up to the chin in their pelisses and their bourkas.

But these dark days are the best days for hunters.

Hardly had the sun risen from the other side of the sea, hardly had the Mollah called the people to prayer, when the Colonel and his guests, including Ammalat, reached the northern gate of Derbend, after literally swimming in mud.

The road which they followed was not remarkable,

it is the one leading to Larki ; it traverses some fields of madder ; then some enormous Tartar cemeteries, in which the tombs are so close to each other that they appear like a forest of laths (props for vines) ; an occasional vineyard ; then the sea, which at this time of year, instead of serving as a shining mirror to the sky, seemed like a gigantic basin from which arose an incessant mist. Enormous blocks of rock, dislodged from their base by the violence of the water, had fallen on both sides of the road and remained there in a state of disorder which indicated the indifference of man to the cataplasms of Nature.

The beaters were in their places.

On arriving, the Colonel blew three sharp and prolonged notes on a trumpet of horn mounted in silver. The beaters, on the alert, replied with a shout indicating that they were ready.

The hunters placed themselves in a line : some on horseback, others on foot, and the *battue* began.

The boars soon appeared and the first shots spattered.

The forests of Daghestan abound with these animals, and though the Tartars, considering them unclean, hold it a sin even to touch them, it is one of their customs to hunt them, whilst it is at the same time a lesson in shooting and courage. The boar is

very swift of foot, and the mountain ones nearly always double back on the hunter when wounded.

The line of hunters, consisting of about thirty guns, covered a pretty large space, the most adventurous and the best shots choosing the most exposed places to avoid sharing with anyone the glory of success. Colonel Werkowski, relying on his courage and his skill, selected one of these places far in the forest and completely isolated ; leaning against an oak in the middle of a sort of enclosure, which allowed not only the hunter but also the boar ample freedom of movement, he awaited the event which in these countries, where the animals, like Nature and man, have remained savage, is nearly always a struggle body to body. Shots could be heard to right and left, and sometimes through the underwood and the bushes he caught sight of a boar passing like lightning. At last he heard a loud cracking sound of breaking bushes, and he saw a large and old boar coming straight towards him.

The Colonel fired, but the bullet glanced off the bony skull and the sloping head of the animal. Still stunned for the moment by the violence of the shock, he remained quivering on his four legs, neither advancing nor receding. The Colonel, thinking him more wounded than he was, venturing into the open

himself, made a step forward to go to him. The boar, which had not known from whence the shot had come, now recognised his adversary and fell on the Colonel, his hair bristling and his jaw cracking.

Werkowski had a second shot to fire—he waited.

When four feet from him he pulled the trigger—the powder only burnt!

What happened next occurred with the rapidity of thought. He felt a violent shock and fell to the ground, but in falling, with the admirable coolness which he owed to well-tryed courage, he drew his kanjiar.

It was one of the finest blades of Daghestan.

The boar impaled himself on it, but the violence of the attack tore the weapon from the Colonel's hand.

The boar had received a terrible wound, but by his bleeding eyes and by the foam which dropped from his mouth, the Colonel could see that he had still plenty of strength.

Lying on the ground, unarmed, and feeling from a sharp pain in his thigh that he was already wounded, the Colonel knew he was lost.

‘Help, hunters!’ he cried, without hope of being heard.

Besides, if they did hear, a hundred feet off, they would not have time to come.

All of a sudden he heard a horse's gallop: a hunter arrived on the track of the boar which he seemed to be following.

A shot rang out, the Colonel heard a sharp whistling noise, then the dead sound which a bullet makes when hitting a soft body.

At the same moment it seemed as if a mountain was lifted off his chest.

The boar forsook him for a new adversary.

He raised himself on his elbow. A mist was before his eyes. Still, through this mist he saw a horseman, who, instead of flying before the boar or simply waiting for him, threw himself off his horse.

The man and the animal rushed upon each other and rolled on the ground together.

Here was the moment when it would have been impossible for a painter to give any form to the group under his eyes.

Only, it seemed to the Colonel that the man continued to strike, though the animal was already dead.

At last this desperate slaughterer rose, covered with blood, foam, and mud; the head of the boar was close to the animal, completely severed from his body.

It was Ammalat Bey.

The Colonel also rose, and, though losing blood from two wounds, he ran to the young man with open arms and thanked him.

‘Do not thank me,’ said Ammalat Bey, pushing him back and hitting the boar’s head with the iron heel of his boot. ‘I did not save your life ; I am having my revenge. Ah ! cursed and unclean thing,’ continued the young man, kicking the animal as if it could feel and hear, ‘it is not much to kill my friend the Bey of Tabassant without looking round, coward, without facing me who called to you, shouting that I had killed your father and stabbed your mother. You went on your way to eventually gore my best friend, he to whom I owe my life, you accursed, you horrible beast.’

‘You owe me nothing more, Ammalat, and we are now quits,’ said the Colonel, ‘and, cursed and unclean though he be, I hope we may be revenged on him by doing the same to him. We will apply the Tartar penalty to him, the penalty of retaliation, Ammalat Bey. He struck with his teeth, we will eat him with our teeth. I hope you will forget your prejudices, Ammalat, and that you will eat your share.’

‘I would eat my share of the man who would have killed my friend,’ replied the savage hunter, ‘so why

not the flesh of an animal, were that flesh ten times forbidden ?'

'And to wash down the forbidden flesh, Ammalat, we will water it with forbidden liquor.'

'As you wish, Colonel ; it is better to water my burning heart with wine than with holy water, since holy water does nothing.'

Placing his two hands on his chest as if to smother his heart between his hands, he gave vent to a deep sigh.

The *battue* was over, this portion of it at least. Cries of recall could be heard ; the Colonel blew his trumpet three times. A moment later beaters and hunters surrounded him.

The Colonel related in a few words all that had happened, showing the boar whose head was severed from his body.

'A fine stroke, a fine stroke, Ammalat,' said the Colonel, turning towards the young man.

'It is the revenge of an Asiatic. The revenge of an Asiatic is mortal.'

'Friend,' said the Colonel to him, 'you have seen what the revenge of a Russian, that is of a Christian, is. Let that be a lesson to you.'

And they both returned to the camp.

Ammalat Bey was absent-minded. Sometimes

he did not answer Werkowski's questions, sometimes he answered them at random. He rode beside him, looking round him in every direction as if he expected someone, and not even thinking of asking the Colonel if he was suffering from his wound.

Werkowski, thinking that as an intrepid hunter Ammalat was dreaming of hunting, being also in haste to return in order to place his leg and his thigh in the hands of the physician, galloped on and left Ammalat to his dreams.

The young man let him proceed till he had turned round a hill, and then, finding himself alone, he stood up in his stirrup and looked around him.

Suddenly from the bottom of a ravine dashed a horseman, his clothes all torn by the thorny trees which grow on all the slopes of the Caucasus.

The rider came straight to Ammalat.

One shout escaped from both their mouths :

‘Salaam.’

And both, jumping from their horses, threw themselves in each other's arms.

‘So it is you, Nephtali,’ cried Ammalat. ‘You have seen her, you have spoken to her. Oh ! I see by your face that you bring good news.’

He quickly took off his vest, all embroidered with gold, and presenting it to Nephtali :

‘Here,’ he said—‘here, take it, messenger of happiness.¹ Quick! Is she well? Does she love me as she used to?’

‘By Mahomet, let me breathe a little,’ said Nephtali; ‘you ask me so many questions and I have so many things to say to you, that they are crowded together at the door of the mosque like so many women who have lost their slippers.’

‘Well, speak; everything in its turn. You received my letter?’

‘So you may perceive since I am here. I received the letter and at your wish I went to Khurzuk. I entered so softly and so silently that I did not awake a bird on the road. Achmet Khan is well; he is at home. He asked many questions about you, shook his head, and asked:

“Does he not require a distaff to wind the silk of Derbend?”

‘The wife of the Khan, who already regards you as her son-in-law, Ammalat, gave a sigh as she gazed up to heaven, sent you a thousand remembrances, and as many little pies. I have brought you the compliments but I threw away the little pies,

¹ The Tartar custom to make a gift is nearly always to give a garment to whoever brings good news. It is thus I received the Nisham who announced to the Bey of Tunis the arrival of his cousin at Marseilles,—DUMAS,

which were turned into pulp by the pace of my horse.'

May the devil eat them! And—and Seltanetta?'

'Seltanetta, my brother,' said Nephtali, in his turn with a sigh. 'Seltanetta is beautiful, like the sky with all its stars, only this sky, cloudy and dark at first, became azure when I uttered your name. When I said that I came from you she nearly fell on my neck. I poured forth a sackful of tender sayings from you. I stated that you were dying of love for her.'

'And what did she reply?'

'Nothing. She began to cry.'

'Dear heart, dear heart, and what did she tell you to say to me?'

'Ask rather what she did not tell me to say, and I shall finish sooner. She said I was to tell you that since you left she has not known happiness, even in her dreams, that her heart is buried in snow, and that your presence alone can melt it like the sun in May. If I had waited till she had finished all she wished to say to you, till she had uttered all her wishes, my dear Ammalat, our beards would have been gray when we met again; and with all that she almost turned me out, because she found I was not going quickly enough, and because she wished you to instantly know all her sufferings.'

‘Adorable creature,’ cried Ammalat Bey, addressing Seltanetta, as if she could hear him. ‘Oh! you will never know what happiness it is to me to be with you, what a martyrdom it is not to see you.’

‘And, by Allah, it seems as if I heard her voice, for she said exactly the same as you, Ammalat. “Oh! why cannot he come,” she sobbed, “if only for one day, for one hour, for one minute.”’

‘Oh, to see her; to see her, and then to die.’

‘My Ammalat, you must see her and live. One never desires to live more than when looking at her. Her look alone doubles the rapidity of one’s blood.’

‘Did you tell her why I am unable to accomplish the dearest wish of my heart?’

‘I told her so many things that, had you heard me, you would have taken me for the poet of the Shah of Persia. She shed copious tears over them, poor child.’

‘You should not have made her despair, Nephtali; perhaps what is not possible now may become so later. To take hope from a woman’s heart is to take love from it. A woman who no longer hopes, does not love much longer.’

‘You are speaking empty words, Djannim. Hope with lovers, on the contrary, is an endless incentive to courage, if you can believe your eyes. If you love,

you believe in everything, even in phantoms. Listen : Seltanetta is certain that even if you were in your tomb, you would come out of it in order to see her.'

'A tomb and Derbend ! It is all the same for me, Nephtali : my corpse is in Derbend, my soul in Khurzuk.'

'And your mind, where is that, Ammalat ? It seems to me it is running wild. Are you so badly off with the Colonel, for a man who ought to have been hung six months ago ? No, you are free, you are happy, loved like a brother, treated like a betrothed. Seltanetta is beautiful, I know, but Werkowski is good, and you might well sacrifice for friendship a very little portion of love.'

'And what else am I doing, Nephtali ? But if you knew how much it costs me ! It seems to me that what I give to Werkowski is a morsel which I tear from my heart. Friendship is a good thing, but it does not replace love, Nephtali.'

Nephtali gave a sigh.

'Have you ever talked of Seltanetta to the Colonel ?' he asked.

'Never ; I have never dared, though I have wished to hundreds of times, but the words stop on my lips. The moment I open my mouth it seems as if the name of Seltanetta barred the passage. He is so

wise that I hesitate to bother him with my folly ; he is so good that I am afraid of tiring his patience. Just imagine, Nephtali, he is in love with a woman with whom he was brought up ; he would have married her, but in 1814, at the time of the war with France, he was thought to be dead. The woman, who for three years already had struggled to keep her heart for Werkowski, gave him up, thinking him dead, and married another. In 1815 he returned : his Marion was married. What do you think I should have done in his place ? I should have plunged my kanjiar into the heart of the perjured one ; I should have carried her off, to possess her if it were only for an hour. No, he knew that his rival was a man of honour, as they say. He had the courage to remain his friend, and saw his former betrothed without stabbing them both.'

'A rare man, who ought to be a good friend,' said Nephtali.

'Yes, but what an icy lover ! Reserved though he was, the husband became jealous. What did Werkowski do ? He came to serve in the Caucasus. By good or by bad luck the husband died. Ah ! this time will he saddle his horse, jump on it, and depart ? No, the Governor tells him that his presence is necessary here, and here he remains, not a week, not a month, not three months—a year, a century, eternity.

As for his beloved, he feeds her with paper, every week, on mail days. No, do you see, Nephtali, such a man, however good he may be, would not understand my love. There is between us too great a difference of age and above all of ideas—all that freezes my friendship and prevents my being sincere.'

'What a singular man you are!' said Nephtali with a certain fondness. 'You do not love Werkowski, just because more than any other he is worthy of respect and love.'

'Who said that I did not love him?' cried Ammalat Bey, almost shivering. 'No, no; on the contrary, I ought to love him, as my benefactor, as the man who saved my life. Oh! I love everyone since I have known Seltanetta. I would like to cover the earth with flowers, and make an immense garden of the universe.'

'To love everyone is to love no one, Ammalat.'

'You are wrong, Nephtali. The universe would drink from the cup of my love. Would that my cup were still full!' said Ammalat smiling.

'That is what comes of seeing a beautiful girl without a veil, and of seeing nothing but veils and eyebrows afterwards. Like the nightingale of the valley of Aourmes, you require a cage to make you sing——'

‘What is the valley of Aourmes?’ asked Ammalat.

‘In the spring it is the kingdom of roses, in the autumn it is the kingdom of grapes,’ replied Nephtali.

And as a group of belated sportsmen approached them, the two friends, pulling their horses by the bridle, plunged into the thickness of the forest.

CHAPTER IX.

COLONEL WERKOWSKI TO HIS FIANCÉE.

Derbend, April 1820.

COME to me, dear Marie, heart of my heart, come to me and admire with me a beautiful night in Daghestan. Derbend sleeps tranquilly on a carpet of flowers, like dark lava fallen from the summit of the Caucasus. The wind wafts the scent of the almond blossom to here, the nightingale is singing in the bushes behind the fortress : everything is bursting into new life, everything breathes Love. Nature, blushing like a modest bride, has covered herself in a veil of mists, the ocean of which make a wonderful dome above Caspian Lake. The sea below palpitates like an embossed cuirass lifted by the breathing of a strong chest. The sky above keeps moving like a rolling wave of silver, lightened by the full moon, balanced in the heavens like a golden lamp round which the stars are shining brightly, like diamonds sown in the azure. Besides which, every moment

the capricious rays of the moon change the aspect of—I cannot call it a landscape; mists without end, and sea without limits, do not constitute a landscape—but of an horizon which one might imagine to be the threshold of the kingdom of phantoms, of the Russian Empire.

You could never imagine, dearly beloved, what sad and, at the same time, what sweet feelings the sight and noise of the sea arouse in me. I think at the same time of the eternity of our souls, and the infinity of our love. This love is in me and around me—it is the only great and immortal feeling which man can possess. It is his own ocean. The flame of it warms me in the winter of sadness, the light of it guides me in the night of doubt. Then I love without tears and believe in everything. You laugh at my dream, sister of my soul, you are astonished at this melancholy language; yet, my God, to whom should I tell my thoughts if not to you? You know that I am a sort of lantern, and from the flame which burns in my heart all my feelings are delineated in my face—and how you will read me! you also with your heart and not with your mind. I am content, in any case, should some part of my letter appear obscure to you. Your happy *fiancé* will explain it to you next August. I cannot think without frenzy

of the moment when I shall see you again. I count the hours which separate us, I count the versts which are between us. So in June you will come to the waters of the Caucasus, and then only a few snowy summits of the granite chain will be between us : how near and yet how far we shall be from each other, my love ! How many years of my life I would give to bring nearer the happy hour of our meeting. Our souls have been betrothed for so long ; why, then, have they been separated till now ?

Our Ammalat still keeps everything from me ; I do not coerce him. I know how difficult, how impossible even it is to change the customs sucked in with the mother's milk and with the air of the country. The despotism of the Persians has left in the souls of the Tartars of the Caucasus the lowest passions, has caused the most cowardly cunning to enter their hearts—and could it be otherwise under a government founded on the exchange of a great despotism for a small one, in which even a just trial is a rare thing, where power is only the right to carry on brigandage without punishment ?

‘ Do unto me what you wish, master, but leave me to do unto my inferiors as I would.’

That is Asiatic government.

The result is that every man finding himself

between two enemies, the one oppressing him, the other being oppressed by him, has accustomed himself to hiding his thoughts as he would his silver. The result is they all employ deceit: before the strong in order to obtain strength, before the rich in order to obtain a ransom, either by oppression or by denunciation. The result is, finally, that the Tartar of Daghestan will not say a word, will not move a step, will not give a cucumber without hoping to receive a present in return. Churlish with everybody who has neither strength nor power, he bows before the mighty, cringes before the rich. He will overwhelm you with caresses, give you his children, his house, his soul, in order to keep his money, and should he pay you any particular attention you may be sure that this attention covers a calculation. In business matters a trifle stops him: it is difficult to imagine how far their love of gain will take them. The Armenians have a lower and viler character, but the Tartars, I believe, are more treacherous and greedy. So it is evident that Ammalat, seeing such examples from his childhood, must have been influenced by them, although he has retained in his nobility of character a great contempt for everything that is low and unworthy. But he has received from Nature an artful disposition, as an indispensable weapon against his

visible and concealed enemies. With the Asiatics the ties of blood, so sacred with us, do not exist. With them the son is the slave of the father, the brother is the enemy of his brother. They have no trust in their neighbour, because their religion has forgotten to tell them to love their neighbour as themselves ; The jealousy with which their wives or their mistresses inspire them, extinguishes all intermediary feelings, friendship does not exist for them ; a child brought up by a slave-mother, without knowing the caresses of his father, choked with the Arabic alphabet, hides himself even from the children of his own age. From the time he cuts his first tooth he is absorbed in himself, and from the time his moustache begins to grow, every door and every heart is shut before him. Husbands look upon him with uneasiness, and hunt him away like a wild beast, and the first beatings of his heart, the first cry of humanity, the first impulses of Nature, are already crimes in the eyes of Mahometanism. He must not let anything which passes in him be seen by his nearest relation, by his best friend. If he weeps he must pull his bechmett over his eyes and weep alone and in silence.

I tell you all this, beloved Marie, in order that you may not condemn Ammalat. These Asiatic customs are so different from ours, that it is necessary

to explain them every moment. For example, he has been living with me now for a year and a half, and I do not yet know the name of the woman he loves, although he quite understood that it was not out of curiosity that I wished to learn the secrets of his heart.

At last one day he told me everything.

This is how it happened.

Ammalat and I were walking outside the town ; we had taken the mountain road, and as we proceeded higher and farther we found ourselves, without noticing it, near the village of Kemek, near which is the famous wall which protected the Persians from the inhabitants of the northern steppes of the Caucasus. The chronicles of Derbend have it that this wall was built by a certain Isfendias ; from this comes the tradition which attributes this work to Alexander the Great, who never came as far as this. In all probability it was Nouchirvan who discovered it, renovated it, and placed sentries there. Since then it has been repaired several times ; at last it arrived, from want of repairs, at the condition it is in at the present moment. It is said that this wall extended from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, traversing the entire Caucasus, having at its extremity gates of iron, that is to say, Derbend—in its centre, gates of iron, otherwise the Dariol ;

bésides, one can see traces of it in the mountains as far as one can follow them ; they are lost only among the precipices and caverns. However, in spite of the researches which have been made, from the Black Sea to Mingrelia, no traces have been found. I was looking with curiosity at this wall, flanked with towers, and I was astonished at the grandeur of the ancients even in their caprices, caprices to which the Orientals of our day cannot attain : the miracles of Babylon, Lake Moeris, the Pyramids of the Pharaohs, the boundless barrier of China, that wall raised in the most desolate spots, on the summit of the highest rocks, in the deepest caverns, all attest the extent of the gigantic will and infinite power of the kings of past ages. Neither time nor earthquakes have been able to destroy the work of man, and the foot of centuries has not been able to crush the remains of this audacious antiquity. I confess that this sight inspired me at the same time with pure and proud thoughts. I pondered over the footsteps of Peter the Great, this founder of a new empire. I pictured him to myself on the ruins of that Asiatic power, from the midst of which, drawing the ruined country with his strong hand, he thrust it towards Europe ; how brilliant must have been this lamp of the Caucasus, the lightning of his look ! What thoughts surged in his mind, what

inspirations swelled in his breast ! The unbounded future of his country stretched itself before his gaze, infinite as the horizon. In the immense mirror of the Caspian Sea, he saw reflected the future greatness of Russia, sown by him, watered by a flood of blood. He had for aim not those simple and brutal conquests made by barbarians, but the happiness of mankind. Odiakhan, Derbend, Bakou, those are the links of the chain with which he wished to surround the Caucasus, uniting in it the commerce of India with that of Russia. O, thou god. of the North, whom Nature created in order to flatter the vanity of man, and at the same time to make him despair of ever attaining to thy height, thy gigantic shadow stands before me, and the cataract of centuries breaks in dust before thy feet !

Pensive and silent I continued on my way.

This wall of the Caucasus is constructed on the northern side of blocks of stone cut square, and fitted in with narrower and consequently longer rather than wider stones. It is what is called by the Greeks, Pelasgic construction. In many places battlements still exist, but seeds of trees which have fallen into the interstices separate the stones with the slow but irresistible leverage of their roots, and little by little have caused those parts of the wall

which have warmed these serpents of oak in their bosom to fall in. The eagle makes his nest undisturbed in the tower once full of soldiers, and in the roads are found the bones of wild goats grown cold years ago, and which the jackals have brought as far as this.

In many places I lost even the traces of the wall, then I suddenly saw it rising up again in the midst of grass and brushwood.

After having proceeded in this manner for about three versts, we arrived at a gate and passed from the north side to the south, under an arch covered with grass and brambles.

We had hardly advanced twenty steps when we came upon six armed mountaineers.

They were lying in the shade, close to their horses, which were browsing the grass.

It was then that I perceived the error which I had made in taking such a long walk outside Derbend without an escort.

It was impossible to escape, on account of the stones and bushes ; on the other hand, it was foolhardy for two men such as we were to attack six. All the same I drew my pistol from my holster, but Ammalat seeing the situation, took it in at a glance, and pushing the weapon back in its case said quite low :

‘Do not touch your pistol or we are lost, only do not leave me for a moment, and whatever you see me do, you must do.’

The brigands had seen us : they rose quickly and seized their guns.

One alone remained carelessly stretched on the grass.

He raised his head, looked at us, and made a sign to his companions.

At the same moment we were surrounded, and a mountaineer seized the bridle of my horse.

There was only one path in front of us, and in the middle of the path lay the Lesgian chief.

‘I beg you dismount from your horses, dear guests,’ he said smiling.

I hesitated. Ammalat made me a sign to remain on my horse, but he jumped to the ground.

That seemed to satisfy the chief of the Lesgians. Ammalat approached him.

‘Good-day, dear friend,’ he said. ‘By my faith I had not hoped to see you to-day. I thought that long ago the devil had made schislak of you.’

‘You jump quickly at conclusions, Ammalat Bey,’ replied the bandit, his eyebrows contracting. ‘I hope, before such a thing happens, to be able to

give a few carcasses of Russians and Tartars like you to the eagles to devour.'

'How is your hunt going?' asked Ammalat Bey, as quietly as if he had not heard.

'It is going badly—the Russians hide themselves, cowards——'

I started, but I found fixed on me at the same time the malignant look of the mountaineer, and the soft and serene one of Ammalat.

'I have also taken a few flocks,' continued the Lesgian, 'a dozen cavalry horses, and only to-day I was thinking of returning with empty hands; but Allah is great, and he sends me a rich Bey and a Russian colonel.'

My heart seemed to stop when I heard these words.

'Do not sell your falcon when it is above the clouds,' said Ammalat, laughing, 'but only when it has returned to your wrist.'

The brigand grasped his gun and looked fiercely at us:

'Ammalat,' he said, 'you are taken and well taken; do not think to escape me, neither you nor your companion. But,' he added laughing, 'perhaps you think of defending yourself?'

'Come, Chemardan, do you take us for fools to

wish to fight two against six ; we like money, but even more than money do we value life. We are taken, we will pay, always provided you are not too exacting ; you know quite well that I am an orphan, and the Colonel has also no parents.'

'You have neither father nor mother, but you have the heritage of your father.'

'I have nothing, since I am a prisoner of the Russians.'

'If you are a prisoner why do you not profit by the occasion and escape—I give you your freedom.'

'There is only one who can make me free,' said Ammalat, pointing to me, 'it is he who has my parole, and until he releases me I will follow him wherever he may choose to lead me. The parole of a Mahometan is invisible like a hair of a woman, but it is as strong as a chain of iron.'

'If you have no money, sheep will do. A word to Sophir Ali, who has stayed to watch your house, will arrange the matter, but do not talk to me of the Colonel's property. I know there is not a soldier in his regiment who would not sell the last button of his uniform in order to pay his ransom. However, we shall see ; Allah help me, I am not a Jew.'

'Be reasonable, Chemardan,' replied the young

Tartar, 'and we will not think either of defending ourselves or of running away.'

'I believe you, and I would like the affair to end without powder and without lead——'

Then, with a scornful look :

'How brave you have become, Ammalat!' he continued. 'What a horse, what a gun! Show me your dagger; it was made at Kouba?'

'No, at Kisslar,' replied Ammalat.

Whereupon, drawing it out of its sheath:

'It is not the sheath you should look at,' he said, 'but the blade; the blade is a miracle of workmanship. On one side you see the name of the maker. Read it yourself—Ali Dusta Kasanischki.'

Ammalat held his kanjiar before the eyes of the Lesgian, who tried to decipher the inscription engraved on the blade.

He threw me a look which made me tremble.

Suddenly the kanjiar flashed like lightning and completely disappeared into the breast of the Lesgian.

I had guessed it. I seized the pistol in my holster and broke the head of the mountaineer who held my horse.

Seeing their two companions fall, the four others fled.

Ammalat calmly proceeded to plunder the dead.

‘Mind,’ I said to him, shaking my head, ‘I do not know whether I ought to praise you for what you have done. A trick is always a trick, that is to say, a narrow and contemptible resource even against an enemy.’

He looked at me with surprise.

‘Truly, Colonel,’ he said, ‘you are strange. This brigand has done a terrible amount of harm to the Russians. Do you know that he would draw blood drop by drop, in order to obtain money?’

‘Quite true, Ammalat,’ I said; ‘but to tell a lie, to call him your friend, to talk amiably with him, and then suddenly to plunge your kanjiar in his heart! Could we not have begun as we ended.’

‘No, Colonel, no; we could not. If I had not approached their chief, if I had not spoken amiably to him, they would have killed us the first time we moved. I know the mountaineers well: they are brave, but only before their chief. It was necessary therefore to begin with him; when he was dead you saw how they fled.’

I shook my head a second time.

This Asiatic dissimulation to which I owed my life did not please me.

As for Ammalat, after he had taken the arms of

the chief, he approached to take those of the Lesgian whom I had knocked over with my pistol.

To my great astonishment the poor devil was not dead—seeing him fall, I had moved my horse away from him.

He uttered some words which seemed to me like a prayer.

Ammalat approached him, and his astonishment was even greater than mine when he recognised in the wounded man—the bullet had penetrated into his skull—one of the noukers of Achmet Khan.

‘How did you happen to be in the company of these Lesgian brigands?’ he asked him.

‘The devil tempted me,’ he replied. ‘Achmet Khan sent me to the village of Kemek with a letter for Doctor Ibrahim, in which he requested him to come without delay to Khurzuk. I met Chemardan. He said to me, “Come with me. There is money to be had where I am going.” I followed him——’

‘You were sent to find Doctor Ibrahim?’ asked Ammalat Bey quickly.

‘Yes.’

‘Who, then, is ill at Khurzuk?’

‘The young Khanene, Seltanetta.’

‘Ill!’ cried Ammalat. ‘Seltanetta ill?’

‘Here is the letter to the Doctor,’ said the nouker. And with these words he handed to Ammalat a little roll of money with a piece of paper.

Ammalat became as white as death ; he undid the paper, trembling, and as he read it he kept repeating in a voice hardly audible :

‘She eats nothing, for three nights she has not slept, she wanders ; her life is in danger, save her.’

‘My God, my God,’ cried Ammalat, ‘and I laugh, I enjoy myself, while the soul of my soul is ready to quit the earth. Oh ! may all the maledictions fall on me, and may she be cured ; may I lie down in the grave and may she recover, beloved and beautiful girl ! Oh ! you droop ! Oh ! you wither ! Rose of Avarie, death calls you, death says to you “Come,” and in calling me to your aid, you are forced to obey death. Colonel, Colonel,’ he cried, seizing my hand, ‘in the name of your God grant my request, the only one I shall ever ask you. Let me see her once, once only, for the last time.’

‘Who do you wish to see, Ammalat ?’

‘Seltanetta, the soul of my soul, the apple of my eye, the light of my life ! Seltanetta, the daughter of the Khan of Avarie. She is ill, she is dying ; perhaps she is dead while I am throwing words away here in

the wind. She is dead and I have not seen her last look, nor received her last breath. Oh ! why do not the burning rays of the sun fall on my head, why does not the earth open and engulf me ?'

And he fell on my breast, choked with tears which could not fall, sobbing, but incapable of uttering a word.

It was not the time to reproach him for his long dissimulation towards me. But was it my duty to allow a prisoner to return, if only for a day, to the house of one of the greatest enemies of Russia ?

There are situations in life before which all social proprieties, all political considerations give way, and Ammalat was in one of these situations.

Whatever might be the result, I was determined to grant his request.

I pressed him in my arms, our tears mingled.

'Friend,' I said to him, 'go where your heart calls you. God grant that where you go you may bring health and peace of mind. *Bon voyage*, Ammalat.'

'Good-bye, my benefactor,' he cried, 'good-bye for ever, perhaps. If God takes my Seltanetta he will take my life at the same time. Good-bye, and may Allah preserve you !'

And he galloped down the mountain with the rapidity of a rock precipitating itself into the valley.

As for the wounded man, I made him mount on my horse, and leading it by the bridle I brought him back to Derbend.

This, then, is the truth—he is in love. Yes, I understand your objection, dear Marie, but Khan Achmet is an enemy of the Russians. After being pardoned by the Emperor he betrayed us. There is no alliance possible between Ammalat and him, unless Ammalat in his turn betrays us, or unless Achmet Khan decides to remain neutral.

The one must not be believed, the other one must not be expected.

I have suffered so much myself from love, dear Marie ; I have shed so many tears on my pillow ; I have so often envied the reposefulness of death, the peace of the tomb, in order to make my poor heart grow cold, that I have no strength. For the same sufferings ought I not to pity a young man whom I love tenderly, because he loves madly ? Unfortunately, my pity is not a bridge which might lead him to happiness.

If he had not been loved, perhaps he would have forgotten little by little.

It is true, and it seems as if it were your sweet voice making the observation.

It is also true that circumstances may change for them, as they have changed for us. Can misfortune alone be eternal in this world?

I say nothing, but I suspect; ah, I fear for them, and, who knows, perhaps for ourselves.

We are too happy, my beloved Marie; the future smiles on us, hope sings for us her sweetest songs; but the future is like the sea, calm to-day, stormy to-morrow. Still, hope is a syren. Yes, no doubt all is ready for our reunion—but are we reunited?

I do not understand why, from time to time, a fear strikes my heart like a frozen knife. I do not know why it seems to me that this separation, about to cease, may last eternally.

Oh! all these doubts, all these terrors, all these agonies will disappear, be assured, my beloved, the moment I press your hand to my lips, your heart against mine.

Soon, my beloved Marie, soon!

CHAPTER X.

THE evening of the same day Ammalat's horse fell under him, never more to rise.

He took another and continued on his way, without a thought for food or drink. On the second day he saw Khurzuk.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, twenty hours since he had left.

The nearer he came the more his aların doubled. Would he find his beloved Seltanetta alive or dead?

He shook all over when he saw the towers of the Khan's palace.

He could see nothing, guess nothing.

'What shall I find there?' he said; 'life or death?'

And he pressed his horse onward with his whip and his knees.

A horseman was in front of him armed for battle,

another rider came to meet him by the road from Khurzuk.

The moment they were near enough for recognition, they galloped towards each other.

Were they two friends or two enemies?

Hatred alone has eagle's wings—they were two enemies.

Each drew his sword on the way; on meeting they struck each other.

Neither of them uttered a single word: the sparks which flew from their schaskas, did they not speak for them?

Ammalat Bey, whose way they barred, looked at them with astonishment.

However, the combat was of short duration: the rider who came from the same direction as Ammalat fell backwards on the crupper of his horse, from the crupper on to the rock.

His head was cloven down to his eyes.

The victor calmly wiped his sword, and turned to Ammalat.

'You are welcome,' he said. 'Be witness.'

'I am witness to the death of a man. Of what use is that to you?'

'That man had offended me; it was not I who killed him, but God. Your presence is of use to me,

because it cannot be said that I murdered him in ambush. He tried to assassinate me in the same way. It was a fight, was it not ?’

‘ Yes, certainly,’ replied Ammalat.

‘ And you will swear to it if necessary ?’

‘ Since it is the truth, certainly.’

‘ Thank you ; that is all I require of you. I do not ask your name, I know it : you are the Chamkal Tarkowski.’

‘ But why did you quarrel ?’ asked Ammalat.
‘ You must have been deadly enemies to have fought so desperately ?’

‘ We were deadly enemies, as you say. We had captured twenty sheep together. Ten belonged by right to me, ten to him. He would not give me mine, and killed them so that they should profit nobody. Then he slandered my wife. He would have done better, the villain, to curse the grave of my father and the name of my mother, than to meddle with the honour of my wife. I threw myself upon him with my dagger, but we were separated. So we arranged, wherever we should meet, to fight to the death. We met. He is dead. Allah has defended the right.’

‘ Probably you are going to Khurzuk—to the Khan ?’ asked the rider after a moment’s silence.

‘Yes,’ replied Ammalat, leaping his horse over the dead man’s body.

‘You are going at a bad time,’ said the rider, shaking his head.

All the blood in Ammalat’s body flowed back to his heart ; he nearly fell from his horse.

‘Has any misfortune occurred in the house of Achmet Khan ?’ he asked.

‘His daughter Seltanetta was very ill.’

‘And—she is dead ?’ cried Ammalat, growing pale.

‘Perhaps ; when I passed the house an hour ago, everybody was running about, on the doorstep and in the hall—all the women were weeping as if the Russians had taken Khurzuk. In any case, if you wish to see her alive you had better hurry.’

But Ammalat did not hear him ; he had galloped off and nothing could be seen of his horse but the dust raised by his four feet. He crossed the hill which still separated him from the village, rushed through the streets, dashed into the courtyard, jumped from his horse, and, all breathless, bounded from the top of the staircase into Seltanetta’s room, upsetting everyone he met on his way, noukers and women-servants, and without paying any attention either to the Khan or his wife he pushed aside the curtain and almost

without consciousness threw himself on his knees beside the bed of Seltanetta.

The unexpected arrival of Ammalat caused a cry to be raised by those in the room.

At this cry Seltanetta, while almost dying, already inanimate, trembled in the midst of her delirium. Her cheeks burned with a deceptive colour, like an autumn leaf which reddens and then falls. Her eyes shone with almost the last flash of a soul about to be extinguished. Prostrated by weakness, for many hours she had remained motionless and voiceless.

But in the midst of all these shouts she had recognised the voice of Ammalat.

Life, on the point of leaving her, waited, like the flickering light of a candle in a candlestick at the moment it is believed to be going out.

She raised herself on one arm—her eyes shone.

‘Is it you, is it you?’ she murmured, stretching out her hands towards Ammalat.

‘She speaks, she speaks!’ cried Ammalat. And they all remained with open mouths, holding their breath.

‘Allah be praised!’ she continued. ‘I die contented; I die happy.’

And she fell back on the bed.

This time the cry was of despair; they thought she was dead.

A smile sealed her lips, her eyes were closed, she had again lost consciousness.

Ammalat in despair had taken her in his arms. He neither listened to the questions of the Khan nor the reproaches of his wife.

They had to pull him away by force from the bed and make him leave the room. Lying outside the door, rolling on the floor, sobbing, now imploring Heaven, then accusing and reproaching it for her illness, his pain, untempered by Christian resignation, was terrible—it was that of a tiger, with its menaces and its roaring.

What ought to have killed the sick girl cured her.

What all the science of the mountaineer physicians could not do was accomplished by chance. Some violent shock was necessary to awaken the frozen activity of life. She had been about to die, not from her illness, but from the weakness which followed it, like a lamp which goes out, not from the violence of the draught, but from the want of air.

At last youth took the upper hand. The violent emotion awoke life in the depths of the heart of

the dying girl, and after a long and peaceful sleep she awoke with some of the strength she had lost, and a freshness of perception which she had never hoped to regain.

Her mother was leaning over her bed awaiting her recognition. Ammalat was hidden behind the curtain of the door; he had given his word of honour not to enter, and the Khan was standing behind him in case he should forget it.

Seltanetta gave a sigh ; her eyes wandered vacantly round ; at last her look fixed itself, concentrated itself on her mother.

She smiled before speaking.

‘Oh ! mother,’ she said, ‘it is you ; if you knew how light I feel. Have I grown wings ? How sweet it is to sleep after a long vigil, to rest after a great fatigue ! How bright the day is, how brilliant the light, how beautiful the sun is ! Even the walls of the room seem to smile ! Oh, I have been very ill, ill for a long time, have I not ?’

Then with a sigh, and wiping her forehead, still damp with perspiration :

‘Oh ! I have suffered a great deal,’ she said. ‘Now, glory be to Allah ! I am only weak, but I know that this weakness will soon go ; it is like a necklace of pearls moving in my veins. Oh, how

strange it is! I see everything that happened like in a mist. I dreamt that I was buried in a sea of ice, and yet that I was burning with thirst. Then, far away in the mist, I saw two stars, but they trembled, becoming darker and darker, and threatened to go out. But I sank deeper and deeper, drawn by an irresistible force. Suddenly a voice called me by my name, and I felt a strong hand, stronger than that of Death, which raised me up out of this gulf, so dark and cold. Then I saw appear in the midst of this first ray of dawn the face of Ammalat. Immediately the stars became more brilliant, and a flash of lightning, like a serpent of fire, bit me in the heart. It seems to me that I must then have fainted, for I remember nothing more.'

Ammalat, his heart oppressed, his cheeks bathed in tears, silent, his eyes and his hands raised to Heaven, listened, and in listening murmured a prayer of thanksgiving.

He moved in order to precipitate himself into the room the moment the young girl had pronounced his name.

But Achmet Khan, also affected, also weeping, whispered to him :

'To-morrow, to-morrow.'

And, indeed, the following day Ammalat was permitted to see the invalid.

It was Achmet Khan who led him in to fulfil his promise.

‘When I am happy, let every one else be so too,’ he said.

Seltanetta had been prepared ; but her emotion was none the less deep when her eyes met those of Ammalat, whom she loved so much and for whom she had waited so long.

The two lovers could not utter a single word, but their eyes mutually expressed all the sentiments of their hearts ; both their pale cheeks bore the stamp of sorrow, the traces of tears. Certainly the fresh beauty of the woman one loves is full of charms, but this pallor of illness, caused by separation, is still more sweet in the eyes of a lover. A heart of stone melts before a look full of tears, which says without reproach :

‘I am happy ; I have suffered so much for you and through you.’

These few words caused the tears to rush to the eyes of Ammalat ; but, remembering he was not alone, he made an effort to control himself, and raised his head. But his voice remained rebellious, and it was

with great difficulty that he managed to say these few words :

‘ It is a long time since we have seen each other, Seltanetta.’

‘ And we very nearly missed seeing each other again, Ammalat,’ replied Seltanetta ; ‘ we were very nearly separated for ever.’

‘ For ever !’ replied Ammalat reproachfully. ‘ You could think that, fear that, when there exists another world, where we see again the beings we have loved in this ! Oh ! if I had lost the talisman of my happiness, with what contempt would I have thrown away this trifle which is called life ! Oh ! I should not have struggled for long. To be defeated would have meant rejoining you.’

‘ Then why am I not dead ?’ said Seltanetta, smiling. ‘ You make the other world so beautiful, that it must be better than this, Ammalat ; and I would like to go there as soon as possible.’

‘ Oh no, no, Seltanetta, do not say that, you must live for a long time, for happiness——’

He was going to add for love ; he stopped.

Little by little the roses of health reappeared on the girl’s cheeks, the breath of happiness tinted them.

At the end of a week things had resumed their

normal course, and everything went on as it did before Ammalat left Khurzuk.

Achmet Khan asked Ammalat for particulars as to the numbers and the position of the Russian troops. The Khanene questioned him on the subject of the fashions and ornaments of the women, and every time that Ammalat told her the women wore neither trousers nor veils she invoked the holy name of Allah.

As health returned to Seltanetta, Ammalat became more gloomy. Often in the middle of a lively and tender conversation he would stop, let his head fall on his breast, and his eyes filled with tears. Deep sighs seemed to rend his breast. Sometimes he would bound from his seat, as if an electric spark had touched him, his eyes shot forth flames of anger, and with a cold smile he fondled the handle of his kanjiar. Then, as if overcome by an invisible strain, he groaned, became thoughtful, and even Seltanetta could not arouse him from his reverie.

On only one of these occasions were the lovers quite alone. Seltanetta, leaning on his shoulder, said to him :

‘ You are sad, poor heart, you are bored with me ! ’

‘ Oh, do not cast such a reproach on one who loves you more than Heaven,’ said Ammalat to her ; ‘ but I

have already tasted the hell of separation, and I cannot think of it without pain! Oh! I would rather die a hundred times than leave my beautiful Seltanetta.'

'Leave me! You talk of leaving me! But for you to ever think even of a separation must mean that you desire it!'

'Oh, do not envenom my wound with suspicion, Seltanetta; up to the present you have known only one thing—to flourish like a rose, to flutter like a bird. Up to the present, happy child, your will has been your only guide. But I am a man, I am not free. Fate has placed round my neck a chain of diamonds, and the end of this chain is in the hands of a man, a friend, a benefactor—only gratitude calls me back to Derbend.'

'A chain, a friend, a benefactor! Only gratitude! Oh, Ammalat, with how many words do you think it necessary to disguise your wish to leave me? But before selling your soul to friendship had you not given it to love? You had no right to pledge what did not belong to you, Ammalat, or forget your Werkowski, forget your Russian friends and the beautiful ladies of Derbend, forget war, forget glory. I hate blood since I have seen yours flow. What is there wanting in our mountains to make life calm

and peaceful? They will not come to look for you there; my father has many horses and a great deal of money, and I have much love. Is it not true that you are not going; is it not true that you will stay with me?’

‘No, Seltanetta, I cannot. I must not stay to live and die with you; that is my first wish, my last desire, but all that depends on your father. I was going to die for having listened to Achmet Khan, to die an infamous and cruel death. A Russian saved my life. Can I now marry the daughter of the bitterest enemy of the Russians? If your father would make peace with them, Seltanetta, I should be the happiest of men.’

‘You know my father,’ said Seltanetta sadly. ‘Every day his hatred of the Russians increases; he will sacrifice us both to this hatred; add to that, ill luck ordained that the Colonel killed his nouker, whom he had sent to find the doctor Ibrahim.’

‘Yes, Seltanetta, like you I regret the death of this man; but yet to this circumstance I owe my knowledge of what happened here, I owe seeing you again. If this man had lived, Seltanetta, you would have been dead.’

‘Well, try your luck with my father.’

‘Do you think that this will be my first attempt?’

Alas! Every time that I have spoken to Achmet Khan of my hopes, he replies, "Swear to be the enemy of the Russians and I will listen to you."

'Which means that we must give up hope.'

The young man approached her, and pressing her more closely to his heart :

'Why bid farewell to hope?' he asked. 'Are you chained to Avarie?'

'I do not understand you,' she said, fixing her limpid eyes on him interrogatively.

'Love me more than anything else in the world, Seltanetta, more than your father, more than your mother, more than your country, and then you will understand me. Seltanetta, I cannot live without you, and I am forbidden to live with you. If you love me, Seltanetta——'

'If I love you,' replied the girl, trembling.

'Let us fly from here—let us leave Khurzuk.'

'Fly!' she repeated. 'O, my God, the daughter of the Khan fly like a prisoner, like a criminal, like a guilty person—it is awful, it is unheard of, it is impossible.'

'Do not say that, Seltanetta ; if the sacrifice is great, my love is immense. Command me to die, and I will die with a profound contempt for life. Do you want more than my life? Do you want my soul?

I will throw it to the deepest hell at a word from you. You are the Khan's daughter, but my uncle also wears the crown of a principality, I also am a prince, and I swear I am worthy of you, Seltanetta.'

'But the vengeance of my father, you forget that.'

'In time he will forget it also, when he sees how much I love you ; when he hears you are happy, he will forgive. His heart is not of stone ; our caresses will soften him, our tears will melt him, and then, Seltanetta, happiness will cover us with golden wings and we will say with pride :

"Our happiness is due to ourselves."'

'My beloved,' said Seltanetta sadly, shaking her head, 'I have very little experience, but do you know what my heart says to me : "Ingratitude and deceit do not make one happy ?" Let us wait, since we cannot do otherwise, without one or other of us sacrificing their honour. And we will see what it will please Allah to send us.'

'Allah has sent me this thought, and he will do nothing more for us. Have pity on me, Seltanetta, and let us fly, if you do not wish the marriage-day to dawn on my grave. I have given my word to return to Derbend. I must keep it, and above all I must keep it quickly. But to talk without hope of

ever seeing you again, with the anguish of knowing some day that you are the wife of another, it is awful, it is unbearable, impossible! If not from love, at any rate for pity's sake, share my lot. Do not turn me out of Paradise, do not make me lose my reason. You do not know to what lengths of madness a passion which has been deceived may lead a heart like mine. I can forget all, trample everything under foot—the sacredness of the domestic hearth, the hospitality of your parents. I can astonish the most celebrated brigands with the bloody fame of my name. I can make the angels in Heaven weep at the sight of my crimes. Seltanetta, save me from the maledictions of others, save me from your own contempt! The night is dark, my horses are swift as the wind. Let us fly to beneficent Russia, and wait there till the storm be past. For the last time I implore you on my knees, with clasped hands. Shame or glory, life or death, all depends on one word from you. Yes or no!’

Held back on one side by maiden terror and respect for customs and parents, carried away on the other hand by the love and passionate eloquence of her lover, Seltanetta floated uncertain on this stormy sea, each wave of which was a passion. At last she rose, and, wiping the tears which glistened on her

long lashes, with as much pride as resolution she said :

‘ Ammalat, do not tempt me ; the flame of love, brilliant as it may be, shall not dazzle my eyes. I shall always be able to distinguish what is low from what is high, what is evil from what is right, what is bad from what is good. It is cowardly, Ammalat, to forsake one’s family, and to repay with ingratitude the care and infinite tenderness of the parents who have brought you up. Well now, imagine if I love you, Ammalat, knowing the extent of my crime—for do not deceive yourself, it is a crime which I am committing—well, Ammalat, I reply, “ Yes,” and I say : “ My beloved, I consent to fly with you, for I place you above all the good and all the virtues in the world. I am yours, Ammalat.” But be sure, it is not your words which have beguiled me, but your heart. Allah made me meet you and love you. Let our hearts, then, be bound from this hour for ever, though the bond which unites them be a branch of thorns. All is finished, Ammalat ; we have but one fate, but one heart, but one life, but one future. Let us go.’

If Heaven itself had covered Ammalat with its azure wings, bringing him nearer to the sun, he could not have been more happy than at the moment when

Seltanetta gave a consent so devoted, so tender, and so complete.

Everything was instantly arranged for the flight of the two lovers.

The following day he would start for a great hunt which would last three days, but the same evening he would return. The night would be favourable, being dark. Seltanetta would lower herself from her window with two belts, knotted together. Ammalat would receive her in his arms.

Horses would be waiting for them in the little chapel where Seltanetta and Ammalat met again after the tiger hunt.

And then, woe to the enemy who would meet them on their road and who would try to bar their way !

A kiss sealed this promise, and they separated full of fear, yet happy.

The long-desired morrow arrived. Ammalat paid a visit to his horse, prepared his weapons, and passed the entire day gazing at the sun.

One would have imagined that this star with the golden rays also hesitated in its course, and would not shine, in the beautiful, indifferent sky which glittered till it was lost in the snows of the Caucasus. Ammalat awaited the night like a bride.

Oh, how slow the sun was, how this traveller of the sky delayed on his luminous journey, and how deep an abyss yet remained between desire and happiness!

Four o'clock in the afternoon struck. This is the Mussulman dinner hour, everybody meets round the carpet. But Achmet Khan was very sad.

His eyes shone under his knitted eyebrows : sometimes he fixed them on his daughter, sometimes on his guest ; occasionally the features of his face contracted, and his physiognomy became scornful. But this expression disappeared quickly in the paleness of anger, his questions were short and jesting, and everything tended to give birth to repentance in the heart of Seltanetta and fear in the mind of Ammalat.

The mother of Seltanetta, as though she had foreseen this separation with which she was threatened, was more tender and thoughtful than usual, and Seltanetta more than once very nearly burst into tears and threw herself into her mother's arms.

After dinner Achmet Khan called Ammalat into the courtyard. The horses were already saddled for the hunt ; four noukers whom Ammalat had sent for were in waiting, mingling with the noukers of the Khan.

'Come ! let us try my new hawk,' said the Khan

to Ammalat ; ‘ the evening is fine, it is not hot, and between now and nightfall we shall be able to get some pheasants or francolins.’

Ammalat had no choice but to obey. He nodded assent and jumped on his horse.

Achmet Khan and the young Bey rode side by side, Ammalat pensive, Achmet Khan silent. On the left a mountaineer was climbing up a steep rock ; his feet were provided with climbing spurs of iron, by which he hung on to the rocks, helping himself also with an iron hook fastened to the end of his stick.

A hat full of wheat was hanging in front from his belt.

A long Tartar gun was suspended across his shoulders.

Achmet Khan stopped, and pointing him out to Ammalat :

‘ Look at that old man,’ he said ; ‘ he seeks at the peril of his life in the midst of these rocks for a little piece of ground where he can sow some wheat ; this wheat he gathers in with a sweat of blood, and often it is only with the price of his blood that he defends his flock against men and against the wild beasts. His country is poor. Well, Ammalat, ask him why he loves his country so much ; why does

he not exchange it for a richer one? He will reply, "Here I am free, here I owe tribute to no one. This snow guards my pride, my independence." This independence the Russians wish to take from him, and you, Ammalat, have become the slave of the Russians.'

'Khan,' replied the young man, raising his head, 'you know quite well that I have been conquered not by Russian force, but by their kindness. I am not their slave, but their friend.'

'Well, that is still more of a disgrace for you, the heir of a Chamkal. Seek for a golden chain, Ammalat Bey. Live at the expense of Colonel Werkowski.'

'Do not talk so, Achmet Khan. Werkowski, before giving me bread and salt, gave me life. He loves me, I love him. Let this be once and for all, and do not let us talk of it any more.'

'There is no friendship possible with the giaours. To fight them when one meets them, to exterminate them when an occasion offers itself, to cheat them when one can—these are the laws of the Koran, and the duty of a true follower of the Prophet.'

'Khan, do not play with the bones of the Prophet. You are not a Mollah, to dictate my

duty to me. I know that I have to behave like a man of honour, and I will do so. I have in me the feelings of justice and of injustice; let us talk of other things.'

'This sentiment, Ammalat, would be better in your heart than on your lips.'

Ammalat moved impatiently.

But, without taking any notice of this movement, which he had observed :

'For the last time, Ammalat,' said the Khan to him, 'will you listen to the advice of a friend? Will you forsake your giaours and remain with us?'

'I would have given my life for the happiness which you offer me, Achmet Khan,' said the young man in a tone of conviction about which there was no doubt; 'but I have sworn to return to Derbend, and I will keep my oath.'

'It is your last word?'

'It is the last.'

'Then this oath, Ammalat, you must keep quickly. I have known you for some time; you also know me; we could not even try to deceive each other. I will not hide from you that I had hoped to call you my son. I was glad that you loved Seltanetta. Your captivity weighed on my

mind. Your long absence was one of the sorrows of my life. At last you returned to the house of the Khan and you found everything the same as when you left, only you did not bring us back your heart. It is annoying, but what is to be done? Ammalat, I will never have a slave of the Russians for my son-in-law.'

'Achmet Khan!'

'Oh! let me finish. Your unexpected arrival, your anguish in Seltanetta's room, your tears, your sobs, your despair proclaimed to everybody your love and our intentions. You are known throughout Avarie as the betrothed of my daughter, but now that the bond which united us to each other is broken, all conjectures must be cut short; for the sake of Seltanetta's peace of mind, for her reputation, you must leave us instantly. Ammalat, we still part friends, but we will only meet again as relatives. May Allah in his mercy change your heart and grant that we may see you again, as an inseparable friend. This is my dearest wish, my most fervent prayer, but till then—Good-bye.'

And turning his horse's head, without adding another word Achmet Khan galloped off.

If a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, and the earth had opened. Ammalat could not have been

more astonished than he was by these words of Achmet Khan. Motionless, dumb, thunderstruck, he gazed without stirring, without breathing, at the horse and its rider, which were already only a cloud of dust.

An hour later he was still at the same place, but night had fallen.

The night was dark.

CHAPTER XI.

IN order to suppress the rebellions in Daghestan Colonel Werkowski was quartered with his regiment in the village of Kiaffir Koumick.

The tent of Ammalat Bey was side by side with that of the Colonel.

Sophir Ali, the young foster-brother of Ammalat, whom we saw appear at the commencement of this narrative, was lying in this tent drinking large quantities of the frothy wine called champagne.

Colonel Werkowski had made him return from Larki, hoping that his presence and his friendship would distract Ammalat from his melancholy.

And, indeed, Ammalat was more than melancholy—he was gloomy.

Thin, pale, dreamy, he was in his tent lying on some cushions and smoking.

Three months before, hunted like the first sinner

from Paradise, he had rejoined the Colonel and camped with the regiment.

In sight of those mountains whither his heart flew, but where his feet might not rest, he ate out his heart ; anger, like a half-extinguished flame, burnt up again in his soul. At the first word gall, like a slow and irresistible poison, spread more and more in his veins ; bitterness was on his lips, hatred in his eyes.

‘By my faith,’ said Sophir Ali, ‘wine is a good thing. Mahomet must have tasted none but bad, or he would not have forbidden us to drink it. Truly this is so sweet that one might imagine the tears of an angel had fallen into this bottle ; take a glass and drink, Ammalat. Your heart will swim on the light wine like a cork. You know what Hafiz, the Persian poet, has said of it.’

‘I know that you bore me, Sophir Ali. I beg you therefore to spare me your nonsense. You quote rhymes not only of Hafiz but also of Sandi.’

‘Ammalat, Ammalat, you are very severe on your poor Sophir Ali. What would happen if he were as severe on you ? Does he not listen patiently when you talk of your Seltanetta ? Love makes you foolish, wine makes me. But my folly has lucid

intervals, when I am not drunk ; yours has none : you are always loving. Seltanetta's health !'

'I have already told you I forbid you to mention her name, especially when you are drunk.'

'Then a health to the Russians !'

Ammalat shrugged his shoulders.

'There !' said Sophir Ali, who was getting more and more drunk, 'now you are going to forbid me to drink to the health of the Russians.'

'What have the Russians done for you that you should love them so much ?'

'What have they done to you that you should hate them so much ?'

'They have done nothing to me, but I have seen them at close quarters. They are no better than our Tartars—they are cunning, malicious, lazy. How long have they been masters here ? What good have they done since they have been masters ? What laws have they introduced, what knowledge have they spread ? Werkowski opened my eyes to the bad side of my fellow-countrymen, and at the same time I saw the defects of his own. It is all the more unpardonable for them, for they have grown up in the midst of good examples. Here they have forgotten them all, hear and think only of the unclean appetites of the body.'

‘Ammalat ! Ammalat ! I hoped at any rate that you would make an exception of Werkowski.’

‘Certainly, I make an exception for him and many others, but, according to your own account, are there many of whom one cannot say as much ?’

‘Are not the angels in Heaven also to be counted ? Look at Werkowski—he is a marvellous campaigner. You will not find even a Tartar with a bad word for him. Every soldier would give his life for him. Abdul Hamid, some more wine. To Werkowski’s health, Ammalat !’

‘Just at present I will not drink even to the health of Werkowski.’

‘If your heart is not as black as the eyes of your Seltanetta you will drink to the health of Werkowski, Ammalat, even in front of the beard of the Muphti of Derbend himself, even if all the Imans and all the prophets were opposed to you.’

‘Leave me alone.’

‘That is not right of you, Ammalat. I would help the devil with my own blood, and you, fie ! you refuse to take a drop of wine for me.’

‘No, Sophir Ali, I will not take any, and I will not take any because I do not wish to take any, and I do not wish to take any, do you understand, because my blood is hot enough as it is.’

‘Excuses, and bad ones. It is not the first time we have drunk together, is it? It is not for the first time that our blood burns—splendid and wonderful blood of Asia! Say something; better, be frank. You are angry with the Colonel?’

‘Well, yes, I am.’

‘And may one ask why?’

‘Why?’

‘Yes.’

‘For many reasons.’

‘But in particular?’

‘For some time he has been pouring poison into the honey of his friendship. Now this poison which he has let fall drop by drop has filled the cup, and the cup has begun to overflow. I hate too overkind friends—that is to say, for anything which costs them neither peril nor danger.’

‘I understand. He will not let you return to Avarie, and you cannot forgive him for this refusal.’

‘If you had my heart in your breast, Sophir Ali, you would understand the cruelty towards me of such a refusal. Achmet Khan, it appears, has relented. He wishes to see me and I cannot go. Oh, Seltanetta, Seltanetta!’ cried the young man, wringing his hands with rage.

‘What I say is, put yourself in Werkowski’s

place, and say frankly if you would not have done the same as he.'

'No, from the beginning I should have said "Ammalat, do not count on me. Ammalat, do not ask me to help you in any way." I do not ask him to help me, only not to hinder me. He puts himself between me and the sun of my happiness. He does it out of friendship, he says, to place the direction of my life in his hands.'

'What does it matter what the remedy is, so long as it cures you?'

'And who, pray, asks him to cure me? This divine sickness of love, the only one a man would wish to die of, is my only happiness, my only joy. If he tears it from my breast my heart will follow.'

When Ammalat had finished talking, night had fallen, yet he could see that the presence of a stranger on the threshold of his tent increased the darkness.

'Who goes there?' said Ammalat.

'Bring some wine,' said Sophir Ali, 'my bottle is empty.'

The shadow approached without answering.

'Who goes there?' repeated Ammalat, putting his hand on his kanjiar.

This name, uttered in such low tones that it

sounded like a whisper in his ear, made Ammalat Bey tremble :

‘Nephtali.’

At the same moment the shadow drew back and left the tent.

Ammalat jumped to his feet and followed the shadow, barely visible in the darkness.

The night was dark, the fires were extinguished, the line of sentinels a long way off.

At last the shadow stopped.

‘Is it really you, Nephtali?’ asked Ammalat.

‘Speak low, Ammalat,’ he replied. ‘I am not a friend of the Russians.’

‘Ah,’ said Ammalat, ‘you also come here to reproach me. I should have thought you would have come on a sweeter mission to your brother.’

He held out his hand to him.

Nephtali took Ammalat’s hand and pressed it convulsively.

There was in the friendship of the young mountaineer for Ammalat something which the latter could not explain. One would have thought that in order to love him the young Tchetchen was doing violence to himself.

‘Speak,’ said Ammalat ; ‘what news do you bring ; how is Achmet Khan ? How is Seltanetta ?’

‘Ammalat,’ said Nephtali, ‘I have been sent not to answer you, but to question you. Will you follow me?’

‘Where to?’

‘Where I am told to take you.’

‘What shall I do there?’

‘You know who I come from?’

‘No.’

‘The eagle loves the mountain.’

Ammalat recognised Achmet’s favourite words.

‘You come from the Khan,’ he said.

‘Will you follow me, Ammalat?’

‘How far?’

‘Four versts from here.’

‘Shall we go on foot?’

‘Are you free to leave the neighbourhood of the camp on horseback?’

‘Yes, but in order not to arouse suspicion, I ought to tell the Colonel.’

‘That is to say, you may lengthen your chain, but not get rid of it. Tell the Colonel.’

‘Sophir Ali,’ cried Ammalat, ‘tell the Colonel that we are going to amuse ourselves by taking a walk in the country. Give me my gun, and saddle my horse.’

Sophir Ali gave a sigh, but as his bottle was

empty he had less difficulty in obeying. A moment or two later the steps of two horses were heard.

It was Sophir Ali on his horse, leading that of Ammalat.

‘Here,’ he said, ‘is your gun. I have loaded it ; it is quite ready, you need not fear.’

‘And why have you come?’

‘Because the Colonel asked if I were one of the party, and I replied I was, and if you were now seen leaving without me, it would have a bad effect.’

Ammalat understood the intention of the young man ; he did not wish to leave him alone in the dark with a stranger.

Nephtali was a stranger to Sophir.

‘Can he come with us?’ Ammalat asked Nephtali.

‘Yes and no.’

‘Explain yourself.’

‘Yes, as far as the exit of the camp. No, to the meeting-place.’

‘Come,’ said Ammalat to Sophir Ali.

And he jumped on his horse.

‘And you?’ he asked Nephtali.

‘Do not trouble about me. I entered the camp without you, I can leave it without you.’

‘Where shall I find you?’

‘You will not find me—I will find you.’

And Nephtali disappeared in the darkness as noiselessly as a ghost.

Ammalat and Sophir went straight to the first sentry, gave the password, and passed on.

Each night Colonel Werkowski told Ammalat the password. It was a delicate attention on his part, in order that Ammalat might understand that he was only a prisoner on parole.

Twenty feet from the sentinel Ammalat trembled in spite of himself. A third horseman was riding beside him. He had suddenly appeared without trace of how he came; one would have thought he had come out of the earth.

‘Who goes there?’ said Sophir Ali.

‘Silence,’ said Nephtali.

‘Silence,’ repeated Ammalat Bey.

Sophir Ali stopped talking grudgingly; he was annoyed at having to leave his second bottle, just as it was being brought to him. He cursed at every step—at the darkness, the bushes, the ditches. He coughed, spat, swore in the hope of making one or other of his companions speak, but in vain—both remained silent.

At last his horse, having knocked against a stone :

‘May the devil take our leader, who, by the way,

looks as if he came from him ! Who knows where he is taking us ! He is capable of leading us into an ambush.'

'There is no danger of that,' replied Ammalat. 'He is the ambassador of a friend, and is himself my friend.'

'Oh yes ; it is true you have made many new friends since we left each other. May the new ones be as devoted to you as the old ones !'

They had left the road, and were in a sort of grove of the arbutus trees, with prickly thorns familiar to everyone who has travelled in the Caucasus.

'In the name of the king of spirits,' said Sophir Ali to his guide, 'tell us quickly if you have covenanted with the demons to tear out the lace of my tchouka ? Do you not know a better way ? I am neither a serpent nor a fox.'

Nephtali stopped.

'You have your wish,' he said. 'Your journey is over. Stay here and look after the horses.'

'And Ammalat ?' said Sophir Ali.

'Ammalat is coming with me.'

'Where to ?'

'Apparently to his own business.'

'Ammalat,' cried Sophir, 'are you going without me to the mountain with this brigand ?'

‘Which means that you do not like being left alone,’ said Ammalat, getting off his horse

He threw the bridle to him.

‘I,’ said Sophir Ali, ‘would a hundred times rather remain alone than in the company of this uncanny person who has come to find you.’

‘You will not be alone,’ said Ammalat Bey, laughing. ‘I leave you in the gentle society of wolves and jackals; do you hear them singing? Listen!’

‘God grant that to-morrow morning I shall not be obliged to extricate your bones from these songsters,’ said Sophir Ali.

They separated. As he went away Ammalat could hear Sophir Ali, who at all risks and from precaution, was loading his gun.

Nephtali led Ammalat through the bushes as safely as if it had been broad daylight. One would have thought that the young Tchetchen enjoyed the faculty accorded by Nature to certain animals, of seeing as well by night as by day.

After having accomplished half a verst through the bushes and over the stones, the road began to descend. At last, after a tolerably difficult walk, the road became a little better, and they arrived at the entrance to a cave, on the floor of which was burning a fire made of branches of bushes.

Achmet Khan was lying near this fire, his gun on his knees.

Hearing the noise the young men made, he raised himself on his bourka.

From the quickness of the movement it was easy to see that he had been impatiently awaiting them.

Recognising Ammalat, he rose.

Ammalat threw himself on his neck.

'I am glad to see you, Ammalat,' said the Khan, 'and I am weak enough not to forego this sentiment, but I hasten to tell you that it is not for a simple interview that I have disturbed you. Sit down, Ammalat, and let us discuss a serious matter.'

'For me, Khan?'

'For us both. I have been your father's friend, Ammalat, and there was a time when I was yours.'

'Then is this time over?'

'No, it depended on you whether it lasted for ever. You did not wish it, or rather, it was not you who did not wish it.'

'Who then?'

'This demon of a Werkowski.'

'Khan, you do not know him.'

'It is you who do not know him, though I hope you soon will. But let us talk of Seltanetta.'

The heart of Ammalat leapt.

‘You know that I wished her to become your wife, Ammalat ; you refused her on the conditions on which I offered her to you. Do not let us talk of it any more. I conclude you reflected, as every man should, on the serious matters of life. But you will understand one thing : it is that she cannot and must not remain single—it would be a disgrace to my house.’

Ammalat felt the perspiration come in beads on his forehead.

‘Ammalat,’ continued Achmet Khan, ‘I have been asked for her hand.’

Ammalat felt his knees give way ; his heart seemed about to stop beating in his breast.

At last he found his voice.

‘And who is this bold suitor ?’ he asked.

‘The second son of the Chamkal Abdul Moussaline. After you he is certainly of all the mountaineer princes the most worthy to become the husband of Seltanetta.’

‘After me !’ said Ammalat. ‘By Allah, it seems to me that people talk of me as if I were already dead and buried ! Am I, then, altogether forgotten by my friends ?’

‘No, Ammalat, your memory is still fresh in my heart, and just now I admitted to you that I was

glad to see you again. But be as frank as I am sincere : I make you judge in your own case. What do you want more ; what do you ask better ? What ought we—what can we do ? You will not leave the Russians ; I cannot become their friend.'

' Yes, you can ; you have only to wish, to desire, to utter a word, and all will be forgotten, all will be forgiven. I will stake my head on it, and will answer for Werkowski, and could anything be better for your own good, for the tranquillity of the Avars, for the happiness of Seltanetta, for mine ? Oh, I ask you, I beseech you, I implore you on my knees, Achmet Khan, be the friend of the Russians, and all, even your rank, will be given back to you.'

' You answer for the life of others though you are not even master of your own liberty.'

' Who wants my life, who troubles about my liberty, when I despise them myself ? '

' Who wants your life—child that you are ? Tell me, do you not believe that the pillow does not burn of envy under the head of the Chamkal Tarkowski when he thinks that you are the heir of his principality of Larki, and that you are the friend of the Russians ? '

' I have never sought his friendship—I have never feared him as an enemy.'

‘Do not fear, but do not despise him, Ammalat. Do you know that a messenger has been sent to Ermoloff to tell him to kill you as a traitor? Formerly he would have killed you with a kiss; now that you have sent his daughter back to him, he no longer restrains his hatred, and it will be either by means of a bullet or a dagger.’

‘Under the protection of Werkowski no one can reach me except an assassin. Against assassins Allah will protect me.’

‘Listen, Ammalat, I will tell you a fable. A sheep pursued by wolves took refuge in a kitchen. It found shelter there, was well housed, and well fed. It boasted loudly of the care taken of it, and had never been so happy.

‘Three days after, it was roasted. Ammalat, that is your story. It is time I opened your eyes. The man whom you called the first among your friends has been the first to betray you—you are surrounded by traitors, Ammalat. My principal desire in sending for you was to warn you. By asking for Seltanetta’s hand I was given to understand by the Chamkal that through him I could become the friend of the Russians much more safely than through Ammalat, who is now distrusted even by those who are answerable for him; besides, these latter will soon have got

rid of you. You are removed and you are no longer feared. I have suspected much, and I know more than I suspected. To-day I stopped a nouker of the Chamkal. He had been sent to Werkowski, under what pretext I do not know and I do not care. What I do care about is that the Chamkal gives six thousand roubles to whoever kills you. Werkowski has no hand in this, of course, but, though master of the Chamkal, he will not be the master of his Government. You are guilty of treason: after having sworn allegiance to the Russians, you were taken armed. It is true your life was spared, but something must be done with you. You will be sent to Siberia.'

'I?' cried Ammalat.

'Listen and see if I am well informed. To-morrow the regiment returns to their quarters; to-morrow a meeting, which will deal principally with you and your fate, will take place in your own house in Bouinaki. Denunciations will be heaped on you, a certain number of complaints will be collected; you will be poisoned with your own bread, Ammalat, and an iron chain will be placed round your neck while they promise you mountains of gold.'

If Achmet Khan wished to see Ammalat suffer he had this gloomy pleasure—the whole time he was

talking to him every word, like a hot and sharp-edged iron, burnt into his heart—all his beliefs were destroyed. Half of what Achmet Khan said was true. Several times he wished to speak, to interrupt, to reply. Each time the words died on his lips. The wild beast which, tamed by Werkowski, had slept in Ammalat, awoke little by little with the words of Achmet Khan. Already the chains were shaking and were about to break.

At last a torrent of threats and maledictions escaped from the mouth of the young man.

‘Ah, if you are not lying,’ he said. ‘Ah, if you are speaking the truth, Achmet Khan, woe to them who have abused my trust and deceived my gratitude. Let me have the proof of what you say—and vengeance, vengeance on them!’

‘That is the first word worthy of you which has left your lips, Ammalat,’ said Achmet Khan, not even trying to disguise the joy he felt at the anger of the young prince. ‘You have bowed your head long enough under the feet of the Russians. Eagle, it is time to take back your wings and to fly away over the mountains. You will see your enemies better from up there; return vengeance for vengeance, death for death.’

‘Oh yes,’ replied Ammalat, ‘death to the Chamkal

who bargains for my life ; death to Abdul Moussaline, who stretches out his hand for my treasure.'

'Yes, no doubt death to them ; but do not lose sight of another enemy whom you are excluding from your vengeance, and who weighs much more in your destiny than any of those whom you have named.'

A tremor passed through the veins of Ammalat.

'You wish to speak of Werkowski?' he said, stepping back in spite of himself. 'You are mistaken, Khan, he cannot wish my death—he who saved me from death, and from such a death, an infamous death.'

'To sell you an infamous life. And you, did you not also save him, first from the tusk of a boar, secondly from the sword of the Lësgians? Keep your account strictly, Ammalat, and believe it is Werkowski who is in your debt.'

'No, no, no, Achmet Khan,' said the young man, striking his chest violently with his hand, 'there is a voice there which speaks louder than yours, and which says I am not, and never shall be, quits with Werkowski, and the voice is that of my conscience.'

Achmet Khan shrugged his shoulders.

'Your conscience, your conscience,' he murmured. 'Look here, Ammalat, I see that without me you

would not know how to do anything, not even to marry Seltanetta. Well, listen ; of him who wishes to become my son-in-law, the first, the one, the only thing I shall ask, the thing in exchange for which he will obtain the hand of Seltanetta, is the life of Werkowski. Werkowski is the head of Daghestan. Let this head fall and the whole of Daghestan is decapitated. I have twenty thousand ready to rise at a word from me. I will descend with them like an avalanche on Larki, and, supposing it were you who deserved the hand of Seltanetta, you will be not only Chamkal of Larki, but of the whole of Daghestan. Your fate lies in your own hands as it has never done in the hands of any other man. Choose, either a prison, at the least an eternal exile in Siberia, or happiness with Seltanetta, power with me. Have you in your heart neither ambition nor love? And now, good-bye. But remember that the first, the only time we shall see each other again, it will be either as inseparable relations or as mortal enemies.'

And Achmet Khan, rushing from the cavern, disappeared in the darkness before Ammalat had even had time to think of stopping him.

He remained for some time motionless and silent, his head resting on his breast. At last he raised his

face, looked around him, and saw Nepthali awaiting him.

Without saying a word, the young Tchetchen led him to where Sophir Ali was waiting with the two horses. Ammalat silently held out his hand to him as a sign of gratitude, and left him without even mentioning the name of Seltanetta.

Still silent, he mounted his horse, regained the camp, entered his tent, and threw himself on his bed. There he rolled and writhed with smothered cries and dull groans.

All the serpents of hell were gnawing his heart.

CHAPTER XII.

‘WILL you hold your tongue, son of a serpent?’ said an old woman to her little son, who was awake and crying before daybreak. ‘Hold your tongue or I will send you to sleep in the street.’

The old Tartar was the nurse of Ammalat, her house was situated close to the Bey’s palace. It was a present from her foster-child.

This one-storied house, surrounded with a terrace like all Tartar houses, consisted of two rooms cleanly kept. The floor was covered with a carpet ; in the niches shone chests mounted with iron, on which were rolled feather beds with their coverings, symbols of Tartar ease. On the beams, hanging against the wall, were tin cups shining like silver.

The face of the old woman expressed the continual bad temper which is the bitter fruit of a solitary and sad life, and, like the worthy representative of her race

that she was, she never ceased muttering and scolding her little son from morning till night.

‘Hold your tongue,’ she shrieked, ‘Kesse, or I will give you to the five hundred thousand devils. Do you hear the noise they are making on the roof, and how they are knocking at the window in order to take you?’

The night was dark, it was pouring; the rain lashed against the terrace and the window-panes, and the wind, which howled in the chimney, seemed like the sobs of lamentation that accompanied the tears of Nature.

The little boy ceased crying, and, opening his big eyes with the black lashes, he listened terrified to the different noises of the tempest.

But to all this uproar was added a still more terrifying noise. In spite of the late hour—it was about three o’clock in the morning—someone was knocking at the door.

Then it was the old woman’s turn to get frightened.

Her intimate friend, an old black dog, raised his head and howled plaintively.

The knocks redoubled, and in angry accents an unknown voice shouted, ‘Ach, Kaninii, will you open the door?’

‘Allah Bismallah,’ said the old woman, raising

her eyes to heaven, shoving the dog with her foot, and trying to calm the little boy, who had started crying again, 'who can it be knocking at the door at this hour? What decent man would come on such a night to knock at the door of a poor woman? Are you the devil? Then go to my neighbour, Kitchina; it is time to show her the road to hell. But if you are not the devil, then go away; my son is not at home, if by any chance your business is with him. He is with Ammalat Bey. As for me, the Bey has discharged me, so you cannot come from him. I owe him neither fowl, nor ducks, nor eggs. He has acquitted me of all debts: you see, I did not bring him up for nothing.'

'Will you open the door, broom of the devil?' shouted the voice impatiently; 'if not, I will break the door without leaving you a single board to make a coffin.'

'You are welcome, you are welcome,' said the old woman, running to the door and opening it with a shaking hand.

The door turned on its hinges, and a man, short of stature, with a gloomy but at the same time handsome face, appeared on the threshold.

He wore the costume of the Tcherkene; the water was dropping from his bachelik, and from his white

bourka. He threw it without ceremony on the woman's bed, and proceeded to unfasten the bachelik which covered his face. Fatma in the meantime had lighted the candle and stood before the new-comer, trembling in every limb. The dog was crouching in a corner, hiding his jaws between his legs, and the little boy had escaped to the stove, which, as it was never lighted, served more as an ornament than a useful piece of furniture.

'Well, Fatma,' said the new arrival, when he had finished unfastening his bachelik, 'you have grown proud apparently ; you do not recognise your old friends.'

Fatma looked with curiosity at the stranger, and an expression of relief spread over her face.

She had recognised Achmet, the Khan of Khurzuk, who on this stormy night was going from Kiaffir Koumick to Bouinaki.

'May the sand blind my bad eyes for not recognising their former master !' said the old woman, crossing her hands on her breast in sign of submission and respect. 'In truth, Khan, the light of them has been extinguished by the tears which I have shed for my country, for poor Avarie. Pardon poor Fatma, Khan. She is old, and old age does not see much at night, beyond the grave which death is digging for it.'

‘Come, come, you are not yet as old as you think. I remember myself a child when you were a young woman at Khurzuk.’

‘A strange country ages a stranger,’ replied Fatma. ‘Khan, in our own mountains I may, perhaps, still be a fruit good to pluck, but here I am an unhappy snowball which has rolled from the mountain into the mud of the road. Sit down here, Khan, on this cushion—you will be more comfortable. But how shall I entertain the honoured guest? Does the Khan desire anything?’

‘The Khan desires that you should entertain him willingly, that is all.’

‘I am in your power, Khan, you know it. Command me, order me; it is for your servant to obey.’

‘Listen, Fatma; I have neither time nor words to lose. Briefly, this is why I have come here. Render me a service with your tongue and I will give your teeth cause to rejoice. I will give you ten sheep if you will do what I tell you, and I will dress you in silk from head to foot, slippers included.’

‘Ten sheep and a dress—a silk dress. Oh! my good Aga. Oh! my dear Khan. Such a guest has never entered since I was captured by these cursed Tartars, and since I was married here against my wish. For ten sheep and a silk dress I will do

anything you wish, even to cutting off one of my ears.'

'There is no need to cut off your ears, woman, it would be better to use them. This is the business. Ammalat will come to you to-day with the Colonel—you know the Colonel?'

'Allah! I should think so; our mortal enemy.'

'Even so. Chamkal Tarkowski will be of the party. The Colonel is the friend of Ammalat. He is about to make him drink wine and eat pork.'

'He who has sucked my milk?' cried the old woman with horror.

'Yes, if we do not take care, in a week Ammalat will become a Christian.'

'May Mahomet defend him!' said the old woman, spitting and lifting her hands to heaven.

'To save Ammalat from eternal damnation, do you see, woman, we must make him quarrel with Werkowski.'

'If I can do anything towards that, Khan, as long as I am your servant and that of Allah I will do it.'

'Yes; listen attentively.'

'I will not lose a word, Khan.'

The eyes of the old woman shone with fanaticism.

'You must throw yourself at his feet and weep as if you were following the funeral of your own son.

You will not require to borrow tears from your neighbours ; you love Ammalat sufficiently to weep the loss of his soul. You will tell him that you have heard a conversation between the Colonel and the Chamkal, and the latter complained that Ammalat had sent him back his daughter, that he said he hated him because of his principality of Tarkowski, to which Ammalat thinks he has a right. You will tell him that the Chamkal implored the Colonel to leave him free to dispose of Ammalat's life.'

'And I will add that the Colonel consented.'

'No, woman,' said the Khan quickly, 'he would not believe you. You will say, on the contrary, that the Colonel was indignant at this proposition and answered—listen carefully and understand.'

'I am listening and I understand.'

'And that the Colonel answered, "All that I can do for you, Chamkal, but only on the condition that you will faithfully serve the Russians, is to send him to Siberia."'

'To Siberia?'

'Come, repeat what I have said to you.'

The old woman had a good memory and repeated it word for word, but for greater security the Khan made her repeat it twice.

'Now,' continued the Khan, 'embroider it as

much as you like ; you are celebrated for your stories. Do not therefore eat mud but talk clearly, and add that the proof of what you say is that the Colonel wishes to take him with him to Georgiewk, in order to separate him from his family and his noukers, and to send him to the devil in chains.'

Achmet Khan added to this fable all sorts of details which Fatma stored in her memory, making him renew his promise of the ten sheep, and above all of the silk dress.

The Khan swore, and gave her on account a piece of gold, which is such a rare thing among the mountaineers that they wear them as ornaments.

'Valla billa,' cried the old woman, pressing the piece of gold in her hand. 'May salt turn to cinders for me ; may I die of hunger ; may——'

'Come,' interrupted Achmet, 'enough ; do not feed the devil on your oaths, but speak words which are of some use. Ammalat has disturbed you I know. Do not forget that it is his happiness which is concerned, that in taking him from the hands of the Russians you are taking him from the hands of the devil. Once convinced that they want to send him to Siberia, he will leave his new friends and marry my daughter. Then you will all come with me to Khurzuk, to your old country, and you will end your

days singing in the land where you began them singing. But take care, if you betray us or if you spoil everything by chattering, I who never make oaths swear in my turn that I will feed the devil with the schislek which I will make of your old bones.'

'You may rest easy, Khan. I am an honest woman, to whose bones the devil has no right. I will keep the secret as safely as if it were in the tomb of my husband, and I will put my chemise on Ammalat.'¹

'Enough ; and in order that there may be no more question of that except at the proper time, I think I had better seal your lips with gold.'

And the Khan produced a second piece of gold, which he gave to Fatma.

'With my head and my eyes I am yours,' cried the old woman, seizing and kissing the Khan's hand.

Then she threw herself on her knees in order to kiss his feet.

Achmet Khan drew back disdainfully.

'Slavery, slavery be accursed ; you who for two pieces of gold can make man crawl like a serpent.'

And he departed.

¹ Tartar expression. To put one's chemise on anyone is to make them have no other desire but that of the person whose chemise they wear.

CHAPTER XIII.

COLONEL WERKOWSKI TO HIS FIANCÉE.

The Camp near the village of Kiaffir Koumick : August 1852.

YES, Ammalat is in love, dear Marie, but how does he love?

Never in the maddest days of my youth, my love for you, that love which was nevertheless my life, never rose to such extremities. I burnt like a piece of paper set on fire by the rays of the sun, he burns like a ship set on fire by lightning and drifting on the ocean.

Marie, do you remember when formerly we used to read—happy days—Shakespeare's 'Othello?' Well, 'Othello' alone can give you an idea of the tropical flame which burns in the eyes of our Tartar. It is true that the Tartar in Ammalat is grafted on the Persian.

Now that the ice is broken he likes to discuss his Seltanetta fully and often, and I love to see him aflame. When he talks of her, he sometimes

resembles a cataract falling from the top of a rock, sometimes one of those naphtha wells of Bakou. Like them, he burns with an inextinguishable flame ; his cheeks light up, his eyes shoot sparks, he is magnificent. On these occasions, touched and carried away myself, I open my arms and receive him on my breast ; overcome by his exaltation, he then grows ashamed of himself, and does not dare look me in the face. He wrings my hand, returns to his tent, and after these crises passes entire days in silence.

Since his return from Khurzuk he is even gloomier than before, and more especially so these last few days. He has implored me to let him return once more to Khurzuk in order to see his fair one again, but I have refused his request. It is my duty to protect his honour. This violent passion will make him one day or another forget his oath, and I would lose the ideas which I have built round this noble-hearted young man.

I have written all this to Yermatoff. He told me to take him with me to Georgiewk, where he will himself be. There, through Ammalat, he will make negotiations with Achmet Khan which will be of use to Russia, and which may lead to Ammalat's happiness and his union with Seltanetta. I shall be

very happy, dear Marie, when I have made this young man happy, and he—he who can never be half-hearted about anything—what gratitude he will bestow on me ! Then, dear Marie, I will make him kneel before you, and I will say to him, ‘Adore her ; if I had not loved Marie, you would not have been the husband of Seltanetta.’

Yesterday I received a letter from the Lieutenant-Governor. How good he is ! He has anticipated my wishes : all is arranged, my love ; I join you at the watering-place. I only take my regiment to Derbend and I leave it. I shall not know what fatigue means by day, or sleep by night, till the day comes when I can rest in your arms. Where is the eagle who will lend me its wings for my journey ? what giant will lend me his strength to carry my happiness ? In truth, my heart is so light, that in order that it shall not fly away I hold my breast with both hands. If I could only sleep till I see you again, if I could only live till then in dreams, in which you would be present !—yet with all that, dear heart, I awoke this morning sad as death. I do not know what gloomy presentiment is in my heart. I left my tent and went into Ammalat’s ; he was still sleeping, his face was pale and contracted, there is some hatred in his heart struggling against love. He is angry with

me for my refusal. But I shall be revenged the day I complete his happiness, and when I say to him, 'What was life without Seltanetta?'

To-day I will say good-bye for a long time—who knows?—perhaps for ever, to the mountains of Daghestan. It is curious, dear love, if I look at the mountains, the sea, and the sky, what sad and yet what sweet thoughts oppress while they expand my heart.

O, dear one, how happy I am to be able to say now and with certainty :

'Au revoir!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE venom of that falsehood burnt the heart of Ammalat and circulated in his veins.

The nurse Fatma had conscientiously earned her ten sheep, her silk dress, and her two gold pieces.

She had related to him in detail all that Achmet Khan had told her, the same night that Ammalat had arrived at Bouinaki with the Colonel, and described where the Colonel had had an interview with the Chamkal.

At first he had not believed it ; but how was he to suspect in Fatma, his good nurse, who loved him like her own son, an accomplice of Achmet Khan ?

The poisoned arrow had penetrated to the depths of his heart ; in his first movement of anger he wished to kill the Colonel and the Chamkal.

His respect for hospitality prevented him.

He postponed his vengeance till later, as a dagger

is thrust back into its sheath in order that it may be again drawn, shining and deadly.

The day passed in this manner: the regiment halted near the ford of Bougden.

This is what he wrote from this village to Ammalat Bey,¹ hoping to assuage the sorrow of his heart by putting it on paper:

Midnight.

Achmet Khan! Achmet Khan! Why have you flashed this lightning in my eyes? Do you know that the flame has penetrated my breast? Oh! forgotten friendship—betrayal of a brother—murder of a brother—to what terrible extremity I have come by venturing just one step—over an abyss!

I cannot sleep, I can think of nothing else—I am chained to this thought like a criminal to the wall of his cell. A sea of blood is flowing and spreading itself around me, and above me are dark waves; instead of stars shining, I see the lightning flash.

My soul now resembles a rock, where wild birds come by day to tear asunder their prey, where by night the spirits of hell come to meditate on murder.

Oh, Werkowski, what have I done to you? Why blot out his native sky from a mountaineer, his most beautiful star? Siberia, why? Because I loved you

¹ *I.e.* what he wrote to himself in his notebook.—*Translator.*

too much perhaps. To you I sacrificed my love. If you had said to me simply, ' Ammalat, I require your life,' I would have given it to you as simply as you asked for it : like the son of Abraham, I would have lain down under the knife and I should have died forgiving you.

But to sell my freedom, to take away my Seltanetta. Oh no ! traitor !

And he still lives !

From time to time, like a dove traversing the smoke of a fire, I see your lovely face, my Seltanetta. Why, then, does this sight not give me the joy it used to ? They wish to separate you from me, my beloved, to give you to another, to marry me to my grave. But it shall not be so. I will return to you through a path of blood. I will accomplish the terrible act which has been imposed on me in order to obtain you, and I shall obtain you. Besides your friends, Seltanetta, invite to our nuptials the vultures and crows. Oh ! I will know now how to provide a feast for all the guests. I will give a rich kalim.¹ Instead of a velvet cushion, I will put under the head of my bride the heart which, I repeat, I loved almost as much as hers.

Innocent girl, you will be the cause of a horrible crime. Good soul, for you two friends will butcher

¹ Wedding-gift.

each other in an embrace of demoniacal fury. For you ! for you ! but is it really for you alone ?

I have heard Werkowski say twenty times at least that it is cowardly to get rid of one's enemy by shooting him or stabbing him.

They are strange, these Europeans. According to them, when a foe has crushed your head under his foot, has ground your heart between his hands, you say to him, ' You have dishonoured me, you have stripped the leaves off the tree of my life, you have withered the core of my heart. We will go and fight. If I am cleverer than you, I will kill you ; if you are cleverer than me, you will kill me.'

And they bare their breast to the bullet or the steel of a traitor.

Oh ! that is not the way with us, Werkowski ; but it was not enough for you to fetter my hands, you wished also to fetter my conscience.

In vain—useless words.

I have loaded my gun : my gun came to me from my father, my father received it from my grandfather. I have heard of many of the famous shots aimed from it. True, till to-day not a single one has been discharged either in the night or in ambush. It has always spit fire and wafted death in battle, in the eyes of all, in the foremost rank. But it fought

against loyal warriors and noble enemies, it had not to avenge the insult of treason ; yet this time, this time, do not tremble, O hand of mine ! A charge of powder, a leaden bullet, a flash, a little noise repeated by the echo, and all will be over.

A charge of powder—what a trifle it is ! There it lies in the hollow of my hand, hardly covering it, and yet it is enough to force a man's soul out of his body. Cursed be he who invented you, grey powder, which places the life of a hero in the hands of a coward, which kills from afar the enemy who would have disarmed the murderer with a single look !

So a single shot will undo all my former ties, and will open a way for me. In the fresh air of the mountain, on the breast of Seltanetta, my livid heart will regain strength. Like the swallow, I will make my rest in a strange country and will throw aside all my past sorrows, as one throws away an old garment torn by the thorns and brambles.

But my conscience ?

Once I happened to recognise in the ranks of my enemies a man whose life I had sworn to take. I could have despatched him with a bullet without his knowing whence the bullet came. I was ashamed to do it. I turned away my horse and did not fire on him, and yet I would pierce the heart on which I have rested

as on the heart of a brother. He deceived me, but was I so unfortunate in believing in his friendship, false though it were?

Oh, if my tears could smother my anger, and smother my thirst for vengeance; if they could buy me Seltanetta!

Why does the dawn delay so long? Let day break. I will look at the sun without blushing, and without growing pale I will encounter the gaze of Werkowski. My heart is pitiless, treason calls for treason. I am resolved—here is dawn—it is the last. No, it was only lightning.

And to give himself a courage which he felt he lacked, Ammalat Bey seized a bottle of wine, which Sophir Ali had brought, and emptied it at a draught.

Then he threw himself on his bed, but in vain. He could not sleep. A viper gnawed at his heart.

So he went to Sophir Ali, who slept, and roughly shook him.

‘Rise,’ he cried; ‘day has dawned.’

Sophir Ali opened his eyes and looked at Ammalat Bey whilst yawning.

‘Day! On your cheeks! But they reflect the lustre of wine, not the gleam of the dawn.’

‘Rise, I tell you. The dead themselves should

rise from their tombs to receive the man I am going to send to them.'

'What do you say? That I am a corpse. By Allah, you are going mad, Ammalat Bey. Let the dead rise, if that amuses them. Let the forty Imans return to our light if it suits them. But I am a living man, who has not slept enough. Good-night!'

'You like to drink, Sophir Ali. Drink with me this morning : I am thirsty.'

'Ah, that is another matter, and the reason is suitable. Pour out a full glass, pour a whole flagon. Allah ! I am always ready to drink and to love.'

'And to revenge yourself on an enemy, eh? Here's to the health of the devil, who transforms friends into mortal foes. Where I go, you will follow, is it not so, Sophir Ali?'

'Ammalat, it is not only wine from the same glass that I have drunk with you, but milk from the same breast. I am with you. Make your nest on the highest peak of Khurzuk. Above all, one word of advice.'

'No advice, Sophir Ali, and above all no reproaches. This is not the hour for them.'

'You are right. Advice and reproaches are drowned in wine like butterflies. This is not the hour for either advice or reproaches, but for sleep.'

‘Sleep, say you? No more sleep for me. Have you examined the priming of my gun. Is it good? And have you renewed the cap, so that it may not be damp?’

‘What is the matter, Ammalat? There is some mystery, perhaps some crime in your heart. Your eye is feverish, your face livid, your words suggest blood.’

‘My deeds shall be still more terrible, Sophir Ali. Seltanetta is beautiful! My Seltanetta! Is it a wedding song which rings in my ears? No, it is the wailing of souls, the cries of the Chakath. Howl wolves! Weep demons! You are weary of waiting. Be tranquil, you shall not wait much longer. More wine, more wine, Sophir Ali—and more blood.’

Ammalat drank off a second bottle at a gulp and fell dead drunk on his bed, murmuring some unintelligible phrases. Sophir Ali undressed him, put him to bed, and watched at his bedside all the remainder of the night, vainly endeavouring to explain to himself the sense of his words.

At last, at peep of day, he himself again lay down, saying :

‘He was drunk.’

CHAPTER XV.

NEXT morning, before marching, the Captain on duty brought his report to the Colonel.

After having intimated that the state of the regiment was satisfactory, he looked all round, and drawing closer to Werkowski, with anxiety asked him :

‘Colonel, may I speak to you?’

‘Of course,’ replied Werkowski, absently.

‘But of a serious matter, Colonel.’

‘Of a serious matter?’

‘Yes.’

‘Speak, Captain.’

‘We are quite alone?’

In his turn Werkowski glanced round.

‘We are quite alone,’ he said.

‘Colonel, what I have to say to you is serious—very serious.’

‘I am listening.’

‘Yesterday, at Bouinaki, a soldier of our regiment overheard the conversation of Ammalat with his nurse. He is a Tartar from Kazan, who perfectly understands the Tartar spoken in the Caucasus. Well, he heard Ammalat’s nurse, the old Fatma, telling your prisoner that you and the Chamkal wished to send him to Siberia. Ammalat was furious ; he said he had already been warned of this intention by Achmet Khan, but before that he would kill you with his own hand. Thinking that he had ill heard, or that he had happily heard that you were in danger of death, the Tartar since yesterday has set himself to watch the actions of Ammalat Bey.

‘In the evening, Ammalat spoke with an unknown man and in dismissing him said :

“Announce to Achmet Khan that when the sun appears all will be over. Let him be himself prepared. I shall soon see him !”

‘Is that all, Captain ?’ asked Werkowski.

‘Do you not think it is enough to alarm those who love you, Colonel ? Also, I have spent my life amid these Tartars. He is a fool who trusts himself to the best among them. No brother is sure of his own head so soon as he lays it on the shoulder of his brother.’

‘Jealousy is the cause of the ill-humour of

Ammalat Bey, Captain. Cain left it as an inheritance to all the human race, but especially to those in the neighbourhood of Ararat. Ammalat and I have nothing to quarrel about. I have never done him aught but good, and I do not wish to do him harm. Therefore, rest assured, Captain. I believe in the good faith of your soldier, but not in his knowledge of the Tartar language. I am not so important a man that the Beys and Khans will bother their heads to assassinate me, Captain. I know Ammalat thoroughly : he is violent, but he has a good heart.'

'Do not make a mistake, Colonel. Ammalat is an Asiatic. Do not therefore expect from him the vices or the virtues of a European. Here it is not as with us. Here the word hides the thought, the face conceals the soul. A Tartar appears an honest man on the surface ; probe him, and in his heart you will find ignominy, wrath, and ferocity.'

'Experience has given you the right so to think, Captain. But I have no motive for suspecting Ammalat Bey in anything. What would he gain by killing me? I am his whole hope. I was to have been killed at dawn. The sun is high on the horizon, and, as you see, I am still alive. I do not thank you less warmly, Captain, but do not suspect Ammalat. Now, march.'

The Captain departed, the drums rolled, and the regiment set out.

The morning was clear and fresh. The regiment seemed a huge serpent with steel scales, now unwinding itself in the depths of a valley, now sprawling on a mountain.

Ammalat marched in front, pale and sad. He hoped the beating of the drums would drown the throbbings of his heart.

The Colonel called him and said to him in friendly fashion :

‘I must scold you, Ammalat. You follow too literally the lessons of Hafiz. Wine is a good companion, but a bad master. You have spent a horrible night, Ammalat?’

‘Yes, a terrible night, Colonel, and Allah grant I may never experience the like again. I dreamt much—such detestable dreams!’

‘Ammalat, Ammalat, you must not do what your religion forbids you. Your conscience also is not at rest.’

‘Happy the man whose conscience has no other enemy than wine!’

‘To whose conscience do you refer, dear friend? Each race, each century has its conscience. What was yesterday regarded as a crime, is to-morrow venerated as a noble deed.’

‘I presume, however,’ replied Ammalat, ‘that dissimulation, vengeance, and assassination have never been regarded as virtues.’

‘I do not say that, although we live in a century when success nearly always bears absolution with it. The most conscientious people of our time do not hesitate to quote and even to act on the proverb, “Who desires the end, desires the means.”’

Ammalat glanced sideways at the Colonel.

‘Traitor!’ he muttered, ‘you may well talk as a traitor.’

Then, even more gruffly, in his breast, in his heart, he added :

‘The hour has come.’

The Colonel, without suspicion, marched near the young man, about eight versts from Kaiakene. All at once the Caspian Sea could be perceived.

Werkowski became pensive :

‘It is strange, Ammalat,’ he said, ‘I cannot see your sad sea, your savage land, peopled with illness and with men worse than disease, without a contraction of my heart, without melancholy stealing over my spirit. I detest war, with its invisible foes. I detest the service, with comrades who are very rarely friends. I lovingly serve my country, with fidelity I serve my Emperor. To fulfil my military duties I have refused all the joys of life. My mind

is petrified in inaction. My heart is buried in solitude. I have separated myself from all, even from my heart's beloved. What have I obtained in recompense? A secondary grade. Oh, when will the moment come that I can throw myself in the arms of my beloved? When will the moment come when, weary of the service, I shall rest in my house near the Dnieper? I have at last my leave in my pocket. In five days I shall be at Georgiewk. But it is strange. The nearer I get to my beloved, the more does the desert of Tiflis seem to stretch between us a sea of ice, an eternity dark and infinite like that of the tomb. Oh, my heart, my poor heart !'

Werkowski held his peace. He wept.

His horse, feeling the bridle abandoned to it, redoubled its pace. Ammalat and he were in advance of the regiment.

He gave himself up to his murderer !

But at the sight of these tears, at the stifled noise of these sobs, pity glided into the heart of Ammalat like a ray of sunshine penetrating a sombre cavern.

He saw the grief of him who had so long been his friend, and he said to him :

' No, it is impossible that a man should deceive to this extent.'

But at this moment, as though he were ashamed of his momentary weakness, Werkowski raised his head, and making an effort to smile, said :

‘Be prepared, Ammalat, to go with me.’

At these fatal words all which still remained good in the heart of Ammalat was shattered.

The thought of the compact made between the Colonel and the Chamkal was recalled to his mind. The path of a lifelong exile came vividly before him.

‘With you!’ he said, his lips quivering with rage, ‘with you to Russia! If you go, why not?’

And he burst into a fit of laughter so strange that it seemed a grinding of teeth, and whipping up his horse he bounded in advance.

He needed the time to load his gun.

Then he turned his horse round on the Colonel and passed him again. Next he commenced to circle round him like an eagle round its prey.

And at each circle he became paler and more ferocious, more menacing. It seemed to him that the breath of a demon hissed in his ears and said to him :

‘Kill, kill, kill!’

During this time, the Colonel, who felt no suspicion, watched the evolutions of Ammalat with

a smile, believing that, according to the habit of Asiatics, he wished him to admire his skill in this display.

He saw him put his gun to his shoulder, and believing that he was continuing his game :

‘ In my foraska, in my foraska,’ said the Colonel, lifting his helmet above his forehead, ‘ I will throw it in the air for you.’

‘ No,’ said Ammalat Bey, ‘ in your heart.’

At ten paces from the Colonel he fired at him.

The Colonel uttered neither cry nor sob. He fell.

The ball had pierced his heart, as Ammalat had announced.

Ammalat’s horse, carried away in its course, stopped before the corpse, throwing its weight on its hind quarters.

Ammalat sprang to the ground, leaning on his smoking gun as if he wished to prove to himself that he was insensible to this blank cold look, to the blood which flowed from the gaping wound.

God alone knows what passed at that moment in the heart of the assassin.

Just then, Sophir Ali arrived and threw himself on his knees beside the corpse.

He leant over his lips—the lips no longer

breathed. He laid his hand on his heart—that heart no longer beat.

‘He is dead,’ cried Sophir Ali aghast, looking at Ammalat.

‘Quite?’ asked the latter, as though waking from a profound sleep.

‘May evil go with you,’ cried Sophir Ali, ‘to you, assassin of your benefactor! The day when you find happiness henceforth will be the day when the whole world denies God and adores the devil.’

‘Sophir Ali,’ said Ammalat roughly, ‘remember you are not my judge but my servant.’

And springing on his horse :

‘Follow me,’ said he.

‘May remorse alone follow you like a spectre, Ammalat, but not I Do what you like, become what you may ; from this day we are nothing more one to the other, and I renounce you for my brother. Farewell, Cain.’

At this reply of Sophir Ali, Ammalat uttered a roar, and making a sign to his noukers to follow him, he fled on to the mountain as swift as an arrow.

Ten minutes later the head of the Russian column halted beside its dead Colonel !

CHAPTER XVI.

AMMALAT wandered for three days in the mountains of Daghestan.

Although in the subjugated villages, he was safe, for the mountaineers, in spite of their subjection, reserved their sympathy for the enemies of the Russians.

But he was not out of danger, nor without remorse.

And the malediction of Sophir Ali clung to him with iron claws.

Neither in his heart nor in his mind did he try to excuse his crime, now that it was committed. He kept constantly seeing the supreme moment of the murder, when through the smoke which surrounded the assassin and the victim the Colonel had fallen from his horse. It was an Asiatic who committed the first crime, who became the first traitor, and the

tradition of eternal remorse was born at the foot of Mount Ararat.

Then, in committing a murder, he had not completed his work.

There remained a still more serious thing for him to accomplish.

‘Do not appear at Khurzuk without the head of Werkowski,’ Achmet Khan had said to him, and, as if none of the details of his first crime were to be spared him, he was now without this head.

Among Orientals an enemy is never really dead until he has been beheaded. Vengeance is only complete when the head of the adversary is in the hands of the avenger.

Not daring to disclose his intentions to his noukers, upon whose courage on such occasions he could not rely, he resolved to return alone to Derbend over the mountains.

Though each of his men would not have hesitated on the field of battle to accomplish an action which every mountaineer looks upon as the necessary complement of battle, not one of them three days after the battle would have dared enter a cemetery by night and violate a tomb.

This was, however, what remained for Ammalat to do.

The night was dark when the young man left the cave situated about half a verst from the fortress of Narin Kale, which serves as a citadel to Derbend. He fastened his horse to a tree on the summit of the hill from which Yermatoff, when a lieutenant, had shelled Derbend.

The Russian cemetery was situated within a hundred feet of this hill. But how in this darkness to find the newly-made grave of Werkowski ?

The sky was dark and the clouds descending towards the earth seemed to weigh down the mountains, the wind which came from the valley seemed to beat its wings like a night-bird against the branches of the trees.

Ammalat shivered on setting foot in this country of the dead, whose last mournful repose he came to disturb.

He listened.

The sea murmured as it washed on to the shore. Around him echoed the cries of the wolves and jackals, whose companion he had become, then suddenly every noise ceased, except the eternal and lugubrious whistling of the wind which seemed like the wail of the spirits of the dead.

How often on such a night as this he had watched with Werkowski ! What had become of that intelli-

gent soul who had there explained to him all the mysteries of Nature, in this land unknown to Nature, into which he had precipitated him?

Then he used to listen to him lying close beside him, or else resting on his arm, whilst now, desecrator of graves that he was, after having stolen the life from the corpse, he came to steal the head from the grave.

‘Human terrors,’ murmured Ammalat, wiping his forehead running, with perspiration, ‘what are you doing to a heart where nothing human remains? Avaunt, avaunt. What! Have I taken a man’s life yet I now fear to take the head from a corpse, when this head represents for me a treasure? In truth I am mad. Are not the dead insensible?’

Ammalat with trembling hands lighted some dry branches and by their quivering and uncertain light proceeded to search for the Colonel’s grave.

The earth newly dug, a cross on which his name could be read, indicated the last resting-place of him whom he had so often called his brother.

He tore up the cross and began to dig.

The work was neither long nor difficult. In the East the people are buried near the surface.

Ammalat’s dagger very soon hit against the lid of the coffin.

With a last effort that lid was removed.

He was obliged by the red light of the burning branches to cast a last look on the corpse.

It was punishment, supreme and terrible, worse than all penalties invented by human justice. Leaning on the body, Ammalat, more livid than the corpse itself, seemed for a moment changed to stone. What was he doing there, how had he come there, why was he there? Not a single beat of his suspended heart, not a single fibre of his mind could have answered; a stench of decay surrounded him, a vapour of death disturbed his sight.

‘I must finish it,’ he murmured, trying to arouse himself from his stupor by the sound of his own words.

But neither vanity, nor vengeance, nor love, nor any of these feelings in the intoxication of which he had committed his first crime, sustained him in committing the second.

It was because the second was more than a crime—it was a sacrilege.

At last he placed his dagger near the neck which he wished to sever, threw the branches far away from him, in order to hide his infamous task from himself in the dark, and after a few futile efforts he felt with horror that he had accomplished his object.

The head was severed from the body.

He took it, and with an indefinable feeling of anguish and disgust he threw it into a bag which he had brought for this purpose.

Up till then he had felt master of himself, but at this moment, when he felt that at last the more cowardly of his two actions was accomplished ; when he felt on his arm the weight of this head with which he had thought he could purchase his own happiness ; when he dragged his feet out of the soft and moving earth, earth of the grave into which he had walked up to his knees ; when in freeing himself from the dust of the dead his foot slipped on some pebbles and he fell back into this open ditch, as if the corpse in its turn did not wish to let him go, then all his presence of mind forsook him. He thought he was going mad. The lighted branches which he had thrown behind him had set fire to the grass dried by the hot June sun. He had forgotten whence this flame came—for him it was of hell. It seemed as if the spirits of darkness, mocking and screaming, flew around him. He himself began to scream and to laugh, and at last he fled without turning back uttering a dumb groan in which were mingled his laugh and his screams.

On the hill he found his horse, leapt on its back,

and rode over the mountain, without heeding rocks or precipices, taking each bush in which he caught for the hand of the corpse, which would not let him go, and the cry of the jackals and hyenas for the last death-rattle of his benefactor, twice killed by him.

He arrived at Khurzuk on the evening of the second day.

Trembling with impatience, he dismounted from his horse, and unfastened the cursed sack from his saddle-bow.

He mounted the well-known steps and penetrated to the first rooms. They were full of mountaineers in warlike attire. Some were walking about, covered with their coats of mail; others were talking, lying side by side on their bourkas. They were all whispering, that is to say, those who were talking at all. Many were maintaining silence.

The knitted eyebrows and gloomy looks indicated that there was bad news at Khurzuk.

Noukers came and went. Everyone knew Ammalat, and yet no one questioned him—in fact, no one paid any attention to him.

Near the door of Achmet Khan was Tourkay Khan, his second son. He was weeping bitterly.

‘What does this mean?’ said Ammalat anxiously,

‘you, who used to be called the child without tears, are now weeping?’

Tourkay Khan, without speaking, opened the door of the room.

Ammalat entered.

There a terrible spectacle awaited him.

In the middle of the room, on a mattress covered with a carpet, lay Achmet Khan, already disfigured by the breath of death. From time to time his chest heaved, but with a painful effort.

He was about to engage in that final struggle of agony which awaits man at the gate of the grave.

His wife and his daughter were weeping on their knees beside him ; his eldest son Noutzale Khan was lying motionless at his feet, his head buried in his hands.

Several women and the favourite noukers were weeping a little farther away from the dying man.

But full of the terrible thought which possessed him, Ammalat approached the Khan and, standing alone in the midst of all the astonished people :

‘ Good-day, Khan,’ he said, ‘ I bring you a present, for which a dead man may well rise ; prepare for the wedding. Here is Seltanetta’s kalim.’

And at these words he threw the Colonel’s head at the feet of Achmet Khan:

The voice of Ammalat seemed to awake the dying man. He raised himself to see the present which Ammalat had brought him. The head of Werkowski was at his feet.

He shook all over.

‘May he be made to eat his own heart,’ he said, ‘who brings such a spectacle before the eyes of a dying man!’

Raising himself with a final effort, and lifting his arms to Heaven :

‘Allah,’ cried the Khan, ‘be witness that I forgive my enemies ; but you, Ammalat, I curse you——’

And he fell back dead on his cushion.

Achmet’s wife had witnessed all that happened in profound terror ; but when she saw her husband expire, when she realised that the sight of Ammalat and his fatal present had hastened his death :

‘Messenger of hell,’ she cried, her eyes flaming with wrath, as she pointed to the dead man, ‘that is your work ; without you my husband would not have thought of raising Avarie against the Russians. Without you he would now have been well and happy in the midst of us all. But for you and through you, whilst going to the Beys in order to cause them to revolt, he fell from the crest of a rock. And you, wretch, traitor, murderer, instead of coming to soften

his agony and calm his death, you rush in like a wild beast and throw in the midst of the phantoms which surround the bed of a dying man the terrible reality of a severed head. And what a head ! That of your defender and your benefactor.'

' But it was the wish of the Khan,' cried Ammalat dumbfounded.

' Do not accuse a dead man ; do not stain with unnecessary blood the corpse of one who cannot defend himself,' replied the widow, more and more angry. ' You who have not feared to come and ask for the daughter's hand in marriage at the deathbed of her father. And who can hope to receive the recompense of men by obtaining the malediction of God ? Sacrilegious and unworthy man ! I swear by the tomb of my ancestors, by the swords of my sons by the honour of my daughter, that you will never be my son-in-law or my guest. Leave my house traitor ; I have sons whom you might kill whilst embracing them. I have a daughter whom you might poison by looking at her. Hide yourself in the caves of the mountain, teach the tigers there to devour each other. Go, and know one thing, and that is that my door will never be opened to an assassin.'

Ammalat felt struck by lightning.

All that his conscience had already whispered to him was now being repeated loudly and brutally. He did not know where to look : on the floor the head of Werkowski ; on the bed the corpse of Achmet ; in front of him his widow ; that is to say, everywhere malediction.

Only the eyes of Seltanetta, bathed in tears, appeared to him like two stars through a cloud.

He approached her, saying :

‘ Seltanetta, you know all that I did was for you, and I am to lose you. If fate so wills it, then it must be, but only say if you too hate me, if you also despise me.’

Seltanetta raised on him whom she had loved her eyes bathed in tears, but seeing his face so pale and livid, she covered her eyes with one of her hands and with the other, pointing alternately to the corpse of her father and the head of the Colonel, she said with firmness :

‘ Good-bye, Ammalat. I pity you, but I will never be yours ; ’ and, overcome with the effort, she fell fainting beside the body of her father.

The native pride of Ammalat flowed back to his heart with his blood.

‘ So this is the way I am received,’ he said, throwing a look of scorn on the two women ; ‘ this is the

way oaths are kept in the house of Achmet Khan. Ah! I am content, and my eyes see clear at last. I was mad to let my happiness rest on the heart of a fickle girl, and I was very patient listening to the imprecations of an old woman. Achmet Khan in dying has taken away with him the honour and the hospitality of his house.

‘ Make way, I am going.’

Throwing a look of defiance on the sons of the Khan, the noukers, and the horsemen who, at the noise, had come pouring into the room, he advanced to meet them with his hand on the handle of his kanjiar, as if inviting them to fight.

But everybody got out of his way, avoiding him more than fearing him, and not a single word was said to him, either in the mortuary chamber or when he passed through the adjoining room.

On the staircase he found his noukers, and at the foot of the steps his horse.

He leapt into the saddle without speaking, left the palace at a walk, and slowly passed through the streets of Khurzuk.

From the same eminence whence he had beheld for the first time the house of the Khan, he now saw it for the last time.

His heart swelled with bitterness, his eyes were

injected with blood, outraged pride buried its claws of steel deep down in his breast. He looked in blind anger for the last time on this house, where he had known and lost all the pleasures of life.

He wished to speak, he wished to utter the name of Seltanetta, he wished to recriminate, he wished to curse. He could not utter a single word ; a mountain of lead seemed to have fallen on him.

Finally, as a last resource, he wished to weep. It seemed to him as if this enormous weight which oppressed him was his tears. It seemed to him that one tear, one only, would reconcile him with the human race and would ask forgiveness for him from God.

‘One tear—one tear—one only,’ he cried.

It was useless ; his eyes remained dry, burning, arid. One must still love and be loved in order to be able to shed tears, and Ammalat, like Satan, hated and was hated.

Days, months, years passed. Where had the murderer of Werkowski gone ? What had become of him ?

No one knew.

It was said he was among the Tchetchens, where his kumack, Nephtali, had not been able to refuse him hospitality. It was said that the curse of the

dying Achmet Khan had removed everything from him—beauty, health, even courage.

But who could prove that? At last, by degrees, Ammalat was forgotten, but the memory of his treachery is alive and fresh to this day, among the Russians and among the Tartars.

In 1828 the fortress of Anapa was blocked by sea and land by the Russian navy and army.

Every morning a new battery, hatched during the night, thundered nearer the town.

The Turkish garrison, assisted by the mountaineers, still at war with Russia, were bravely fighting.

In the southern end of the town the Russians at last succeeded in making a breach.

The wall fell under the shower of bullets, but its thickness made the work slow and difficult.

From time to time, especially during the great heat of the day, the exhausted artillerymen were allowed to rest for an hour or two.

During one of these rests, when the cannons were silent and the artillerymen slept, from the top of the wall, supported by ropes passed round the belly of his mount, could be seen a rider on a white horse.

Hardly had he touched the earth when the ropes

were drawn up again to the top of the wall, whilst the rider cleared the ditch trench with a single leap, and, putting his horse at a gallop, passed like lightning between the batteries and the soldiers.

A few shots followed him, but in vain : he disappeared into the forest.

He had hardly been perceived ; no one thought of pursuing him.

Soon, amidst the distraction caused by the cannonade which had reopened, the rider was forgotten.

That night, the breach having become practicable, the Russians prepared for the assault. Suddenly, from the side of the forest they were attacked by the mountaineers.

The terrible cry, ‘ Allah, Greill, Allah ! ’ answered them from the walls of Anapa.

But the Russians turned their guns towards their unexpected assailants and soon dispersed the mountaineers, who took to flight, leaving their dead and wounded on the field of battle, and shouting :

‘ Giaour, giaour, her.’

But from the commencement of the encounter, and till the moment when the battlefield was completely swept, the Russians had seen a Circassian mounted on a white horse riding up and down in front of the Russian batteries without paying any

attention to the bullets and balls raining around him.

This impassiveness, and above all the invulnerability of the mountaineer, made the artillerymen furious ; bullets were digging holes in the ground all round him, bullets were raising the ground round the feet of his horse. The horse reared, the horse plunged, but he held the terrified animal up, calming him with his hand, and not appearing to pay any attention to the danger which surrounded him on all sides.

‘To me the horse and to you twenty-five roubles,’ said an artillery officer to the soldier in command of the gun of his battery, ‘if you shoot that fellow.’

The marksman looked.

‘This is the third time I have aimed at him,’ he said, ‘and he must be the devil himself to be still on his horse ; but, Captain,’ he continued, ‘you may load the cannon with my own head for the next shot if I miss this one.’

And, having pointed his cannon with particular attention, he took the match from the hand of his comrade and fired it himself.

For a moment it was impossible to distinguish anything. But the smoke soon disappeared and the terrified horse could be seen dragging the corpse of

his master, whose foot had remained caught in the stirrup.

‘Hit! dead!’ shouted the soldiers.

The young officer raised his helmet, made a sign of the cross, and leapt over the battery to catch the horse, which was a splendid beast, born as far as one could guess in Khorasan.

He soon reached him: the horse was going round in a circle, dragging the body of the mountaineer. The bullet had shot away his arm near the shoulder, but he was still breathing.

The young officer called four artillerymen and had the dying man carried to his tent.

He himself went for the doctor. But the doctor, on examining the terrible wound, said he would have to amputate the arm and that the wounded man would die during the operation.

It would be better, then, to let him die peacefully of his wound than to let him die more quickly and more painfully of the operation.

He ordered a refreshing drink—the only consolation he could give to the sick man.

The officer remained alone in his tent with his guest, having only with him a Tartar interpreter whom he had sent for, in case the dying man, who it was easy to see was a chief, might regain

consciousness and have some last instructions to give.

Toward one o'clock in the morning the wounded man moved and sighed two or three times, as if some vision was troubling him in his agony.

The young officer rose, raised the lantern to the face of the dying man, who had not yet regained consciousness, and looked at him with more attention than he had yet bestowed on him.

The face of the wounded man was dark, deep wrinkles furrowed his brow and disfigured a face which must have been extraordinarily handsome before it was marred by disordered passions, the traces of which remained. It was indeed easy to recognise that the pallor which overspread it was caused more by the sorrow of life than by the painful embrace of death.

His breathing became more and more laboured. With the one hand which remained he seemed to try to remove some avenging spectre. At last speech returned, and after a few incomprehensible words, the officer and the interpreter made out the following :

‘Blood, always blood,’ he murmured, looking at his one remaining hand, which was the right one. ‘Why have you put his bloody shirt on me? Was I

not already swimming in blood ? Do not drag me back to life as you are doing—life is hell, it is so sweet and cool in the grave.'

He fainted again and the words died on his lips

The officer asked the interpreter for some water, dipped his hand in the glass, and shook the water with his fingers on the face of the dying man.

He trembled, opened his eyes again, shook his head as if to remove the shadow of death which already surrounded him, and by the light of the lantern which the interpreter held he perceived the Captain.

His vacant expression became fixed and terrified, he looked at the officer, tried to raise himself on the arm which was wounded, fell down, and raised himself on the other.

His hair stood on end, the perspiration poured down his forehead, he became livid.

His expression by degrees became one of the most profound terror.

'Your name ?' he said in a jerky voice which had nothing human in it. 'Who are you ? Are you a messenger from the grave—say—speak—answer ?'

'I am Werkowski,' replied the young officer.

These three apparently simple words were like a dagger thrust in the heart of the dying man.

He uttered a shriek, shuddered, and fell back on his pillow.

The hand of death had suffocated him. The face of the Circassian was completely altered.

‘This man was probably a great sinner,’ said the young officer sadly, addressing the interpreter.

‘Or else a great traitor,’ added the latter. ‘He must be, or rather he must have been, for he is dead, a Russian deserter. I never heard a mountaineer speak our language with such purity. Let us look at his weapons ; perhaps there will be some inscription on them. Sometimes the armourers of Kouba, of Andrea, or of Koubach add to their own name that of him for whom they work.’

And drawing the kanjiar from the belt of the dead man he began by examining the blade.

This inscription was engraved in gold on the burnished steel :

‘Be slow to take offence and quick to avenge.’

The interpreter translated it to the officer.

‘Yes, it is a maxim with these brigands,’ said the latter ; ‘my poor brother, the Colonel, fell a victim to one of these wretches.’

The young man dried a tear.

Then, to the interpreter :

‘Now,’ he said, ‘examine the sheath.’

The interpreter unfastened the sheath from the belt of the dead man, and indeed there was engraved on it these five Tartar words :

Man kairlmich—idm Ammalat beydan otri.

‘I was made for Ammalat Bey.’

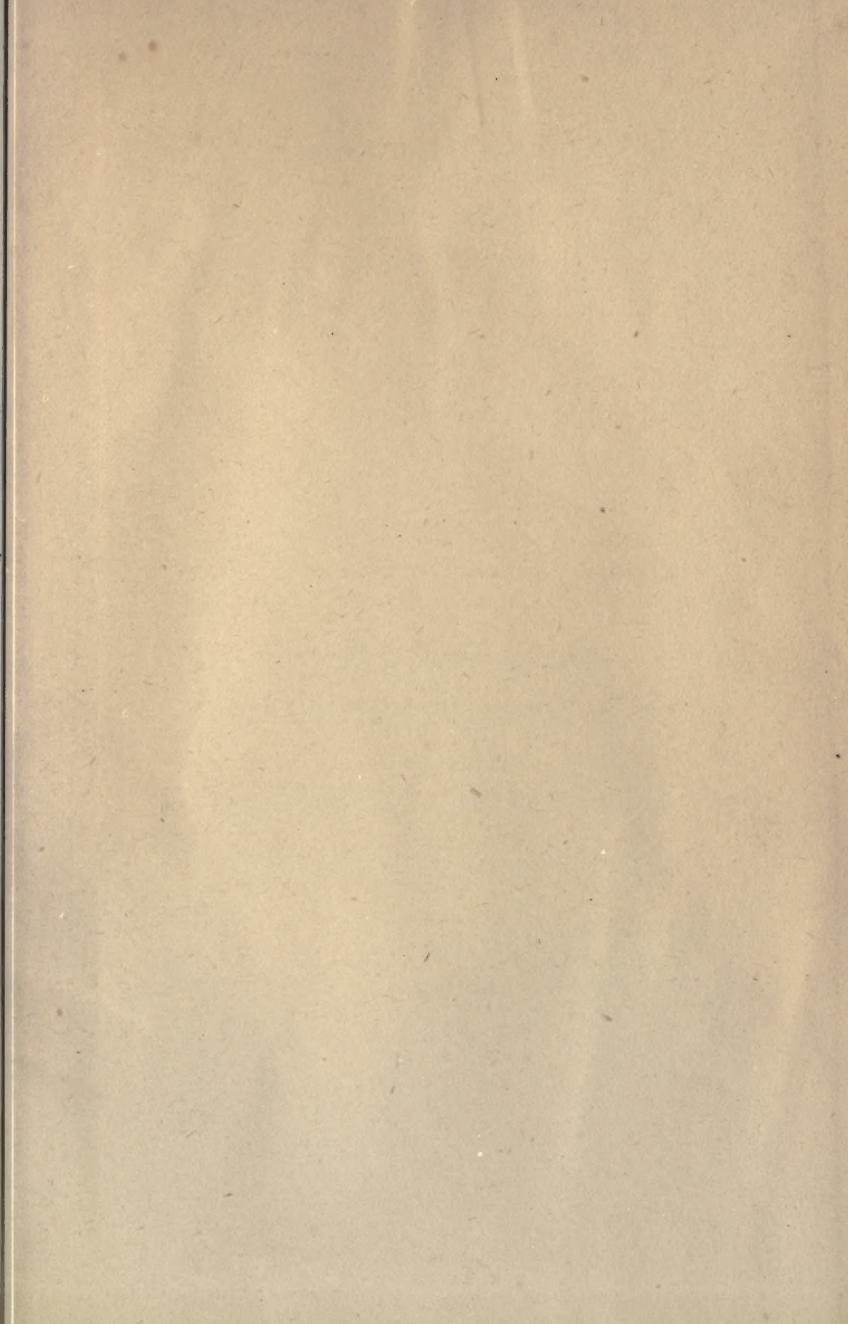
THE END.

184 - Puis a l'insigne -
 - Maintenant dis il, examinant le fourreau
 L'insigne se détacha du fourreau de la Ceinture Du mort - et en
 effet il y trouva Gracie ces cinq mots tartars -
 من قیلش ایدم امالات بکدن اتری
 - J'ai été fait pour Ammalat Bey

(1) Man Kairlmich - idm ammalat beydan
 Otri -

(Signature)
 1818 Paris. Ganeval

FAC-SIMILE OF FINAL PAGE OF THE MS., WITH AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE.





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